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Interview with
Jack O. Burge
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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Jack Burge

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Azle, Texas

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Jack Burge for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on May 16, 1978, in Azle, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Burge in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a prisoner-of-war of the Japanese during World War II. Mr. Burge was aboard the cruiser USS Houston, which was sunk in the Sunda Straits very early in World War II. In fact, it was sunk at approximately 12:45 a.m. on March 1, 1942.

Now, Mr. Burge, to begin this interview, just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Burge: I was born the 9th of August, 1918, in a little old place called Beckett, Ohio, which is long gone. I went to school when there was eight grades in one room, and fifteen or twenty is a lot of families for the

seventh grade. My father said I wasn't getting enough out of it, which none of us were. We had kids there older than the teachers, because back then a teacher graduated at seventeen or eighteen. They would go to summer teaching school, and that fall they gave them a country school to teach, you know. So we had boys in the seventh and eighth grade that was eighteen and nineteen, because they had to get out and farm and stuff like that, and back then they didn't place so much on it. But anyway, my father said, "You're going to town, and you're going to graduate." So the first couple of years until they got the road a little in shape, I pushed the school bus, and then after that, I got to ride it (chuckle)--through the mud and stuff, you know.

After I graduated, you could see World War II coming on. You read the papers and listened to the radio and so on. So my father, he didn't want me to go. I said, "Do you want me to go in as cannon fodder when it happens, or you want me to be in there and have a trade?" So finally he signed the papers.

Marcello: Now when did this occur?

Burge: Well, in April of '38. But I had a tooth . . . and they were so strict back then. You bit down on one of these tongue depressors, and that one back tooth didn't line up, and it

took me until October to get the waiver on it so that I could go. So I went on October 9, 1938. I went to Newport, Rhode Island, for boot camp.

Marcello: I gather that it was pretty hard to get in the service at that particular time yet, even though a national emergency perhaps was coming on.

Burge: They didn't lower the standards a bit, I don't think, until the war started or shortly before, because some of the boys we got aboard there just before the war started that come out on transports and stuff from China, I couldn't believe that they got in.

A friend of mine . . . there was four of us that went down to enlist, and the big, tall, old boy . . . well, he just kind of shone. His mother was a schoolteacher, and he was above us old farm boys in education a little bit and stuff. Well, they took him and run him right on through; they had us taking our physical and our written examinations to see if we could pass them, because they didn't have any doubt about him. They said you could have one tooth missing and all of them filled. So this old recruiter has got his eye on him if he don't get anybody else. J. B. Story was his name; he's up in Woodall, Kansas. He's got a cattle ranch up there. He went on to college after the war. But they said, "Let's see your teeth," and he just took them out and handed them to him.

He'd had them knocked out in a car wreck (chuckle) when he was thirteen, and he had false teeth, see. So that put the quietus to that. As soon as the war started, why, they called him right in, and he went on up to chief "motor mech."

Marcello: And as you mentioned, you did foresee the possibility of war coming on as early as 1938.

Burge: To me it looked like it, just from the papers and so on. Well, I could feel it more than I could see it, but there was always things that were getting worse instead of better and then Germany was getting on its "high horse," and we was telling England how much we thought of them. Just two and two make four.

Marcello: How did you eventually get aboard the cruiser Houston? You might describe how this all occurred.

Burge: Well, when we got back off of boot leave, anyone six feet and over automatically went into World's Fair detachment. That's when they were going to have the World's Fair detachment in New York. They took 500 of us, and it was march, march. The Army never had it like we had it--sixty-four count silent manual of arms, Queen Anne's salute, and all this stuff.

So I believe it was the first of April sometime, they fell us out there for muster one morning and said, "We have

very bad news for you. We're going to have to cut down 150 on this detachment." It was 500 to begin with. They asked, "Would any volunteers take one pace forward?" So 500 of us stepped forward, and I happened to be on the end, and they counted the 150 off (chuckle).

So they sent us to Charleston, South Carolina. The Houston had just made a presidential cruise with Roosevelt, and we went aboard.

Marcello: The Houston was evidently a very pretty ship, was it not?

Burge: Oh, she was the pride of the fleet. They used to call it the "Floating White House," because President Roosevelt, he adopted her. Of course, he had to have an elevator pulled by men to take him up to his stateroom; he couldn't navigate the ladders, you know.

Marcello: Were you on board the Houston during any of the presidential cruises?

Burge: I just did miss his last one. Eventually, we went to the West Coast, and we spent all summer out there waiting for him to come out. But things were getting to where he couldn't leave. We had his fishing yacht aboard, and we had a chief boatswain's mate that didn't do anything but take care of his fishing gear and all this stuff. We waited in Long Beach a long time, and then we went up to Bremerton, Washington. We waited and waited, and he never could get free to go. He did

send a bunch of Congressmen, and we took them to every island in the Pacific, checking the installations for defense and so on. So we got a real cruise out of it, but we didn't get to go with the President.

Marcello: Now eventually, how did the Houston get over into the Far East, let's say, by 1942?

Burge: We went out there to relieve the Augusta; it was a sister ship to the Houston. They always had traded off on China Station. Prior to that, about a year-and-a-half, we were a flagship for the "Pineapple Fleet," they called it--the Hawaiian Detachment. Then we came and got a little outfitted and went on over to . . . well, I believe it was October of '40 that we relieved the Augusta in the Manila Bay.

Marcello: Did you stay over on the Asiatic Station for the rest of the time then?

Burge: Oh, yes. Yes, I'd still be over there if the war hadn't started (chuckle); I liked it over there.

Marcello: This is kind of interesting to me, because we've done a great many interviews with Pearl Harbor survivors. One of the most fascinating group of people that I hear them talk about are the old Asiatic sailors, especially those that were on the river patrols and so on in China. Did you have any of those old Asiatic sailors aboard the Houston at that time?

- Burge: Oh, yes. Yes, there was lots of them that, when one cruiser would be coming back to the States, they'd put in for transfer to the other one. There was a lot of people that didn't want to stay out there at all, and they'd trade with them. Back then you could trade off rate for rate. But some of them old boys hadn't been back to the States in fifteen or twenty years.
- Marcello: Evidently, they really enjoyed themselves over in China.
- Burge: It was a different way of life, but it was a wonderful life (chuckle).
- Marcello: I gather that most of those Asiatic sailors were virtually tattooed from head to toe.
- Burge: Yes, some of them on the bottom of their feet, I think (chuckle). This one old boy, he always had a big piece of jade swinging on his watch chain. Oh, it was almost as big as a golf ball; I don't know how you'd carry it around. He'd been out there thirteen years. He wore his high-top shoes like they wore in boot camp--the ankle height--and he had a Missouri farm magazine in his pocket. He stood there and looked out at sea with that "Asiatic stare," you know. I said, "What'd you see out there?" "Nothing," he said. "I'm just thinking about these people that's Asiatic. I've been out here thirteen years, and there ain't nothing wrong with me. I don't understand them."

Marcello: What is the "Asiatic stare" that you talked about awhile ago? I've heard this term used before.

Burge: This is just that blank look you get in your eye. You can sit by the hour and look out to sea. You don't see anything; they just stare, you know. When they talk to you, they don't talk to you. They just keep right on looking off into the void.

We went to Olongapo. When we got there . . . of course, I didn't know this; I was new on that station. The old boy said his wife would be there. Well, he'd married a Filipino and had about eleven kids. She drove from Manila to Olongapo in a cart. They had a little atap roof built over it and stuff, and that was what we'd call a motor home now. That was the Philippine version of it. Sure enough, she was down there on the dock with her family waiting for him to come home.

Marcello: Well, there's no doubt that that's a phase of the Navy that's no longer in existence.

Burge: No, that was the good old days.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the actual coming of the war. Describe where you were and what you were doing and how you responded when you heard about the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor.

Burge: Well, the people on the street would stop you, like, in

Manila and around, and they'd say, "The war is coming. The war is coming. Where are you going? What are you going to do?" We said, "Well, we'll be here. We'll be here to fight, you know." They said, "The Japanese are very close." There was nothing in the papers; you didn't know anything. Of course, we'd been down in the southern Philippines supporting flying boats that were photographing them and so on, you know. We'd take turns down there and take supplies. I can't think of the name of it . . . Iloilo; we were in Iloilo when things really got rough. I don't know whether it was Iloilo or Manila where we were at when Pearl Harbor was bombed.

Marcello: What sort of impression or reaction did you and your fellow crew members have when you heard about the attack at Pearl Harbor?

Burge: Oh, we were surprised just like everybody else. We knew it was coming, but we hadn't considered it coming to Pearl Harbor, you know. We expected it to start out there.

Marcello: I'm sure that you didn't realize the extent of the damage that had been done at Pearl Harbor.

Burge: Oh, we had no way of knowing at the time. I guess it was around three o'clock Philippines time when we got the word-- in the morning, that is. We were a day off, you know, with the time changes. They woke me up because they had to go

down in a void under my bunk. They had these round plates made up--steel plates--to weld over the portholes. "What are you doing down here in the middle of the night?" "Well, Pearl Harbor's been bombed. We've got to black out the ship." So that was the way I found out about it--about three o'clock in the morning when they came after those plates.

Marcello: How long a war did you foresee at this particular time? I'm referring now to the opinion of you and your shipmates.

Burge: Well, right off the bat, we said, "Well, it won't take over six months to whip them," you know.

Marcello: Did most of the crew members have a relatively low opinion of the Japanese?

Burge: That's about all you'd heard--thick glasses and rice paddy coolies. Probably the more educated and more studied knew better, but we didn't think it'd take long.

Marcello: Had you had any contact at all with any Japanese vessels during this period while you were over there on the Asiatic Station?

Burge: Not as far as I know we hadn't, aside from these planes going out and photographing them on maneuvers. They was holding maneuvers in the South China Sea, and our reconnaissance planes were taking movies of them.

Marcello: Did you ever hear any of the "old salts" talk about the

seamanship or fighting prowess of the Japanese?

Burge: No. There again, the ones that was up on the Yangtze and so on didn't have too high an opinion of them, because all they saw was the foot soldier. Their old bombers weren't too good at the time, so there wasn't anything really impressive. It was just one Asiatic fighting another. I guess they were getting experience to go on to big things. I don't know (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay, now what role did the Houston assume after news of the Pearl Harbor attack had been received? In other words, what did the Houston do at that point? What function did it perform?

Burge: Escorting convoys.

Marcello: Where were you escorting them? From where to where?

Burge: Well, we took one to Port Darwin, Australia, and then we picked up a convoy there, and we took it to Timor. We got bombed going and coming, and we got bombed with other convoys. But our captain that we had, he was something else. The only bomb that we got hit with was a stray. He dodged all the rest of them. . . . thirty-two knots and pull right and pull left rudder and so on.

Marcello: So you did actually come under attack and so on while you were on this convoy duty.

Burge: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Do you recall the incident when that bomb hit the Houston during this period? What are your impressions of it?

Burge: I didn't want any more of them. The first bombing we got, I'd just come off of watch and took a shower. I had one of these seventeen-cent--which was real expensive--cigars a day then, and I had it in my mouth . . . I didn't very often light them. They sounded GQ, and I'd just been in the engine room. We worked two hours in the engine room and two hours in the aftermidship repair. Well, the captain gets the ship to swinging, and everything's rattling and banging, and they drop one on each side of us. As far as I know, I swallowed that cigar; I never did find that thing (chuckle).

Marcello: Were you very close to where that bomb hit?

Burge: Yes, I was a compartment away when it hit. As far as I know, it killed every man in the after repair party but one. There was two guys sitting on a hatch back-to-back. They got the one facing the blast, and the other one didn't get hurt. But as far as I know, it got the rest of them. There was about forty-eight altogether. See, the 5-inch guns weren't reaching them, so they was going to try an 8-inch salvo way off as they was coming in to see if the concussion and so on would swing them together, you know, and cause some accidents up there.

This bomb armed itself on the mainmast and slid down. The turret was trained out to the side, and it came down right between that and the after restroom on the main deck. It blew up just off the deck, and the shrapnel penetrated the turret and set off the powder in there. The guns were loaded and everything, and the powder circle was open. So it got everybody in the turret. The fact of the case is, I was a talker in that turret when I was on deck, and I put in to go to the engine room. All they found off the talker that was in that turret was his finger with his wedding band on it out on deck.

Marcello: Obviously, it put that turret completely out of commission, did it not?

Burge: It put it completely out, and they had to flood the powder circle and everything and flood the ammunition, see. It got everybody in the turret and down in the powder circle and down in the ammo rooms below it. Aside from the repair party, it got, I think, forty-eight altogether. We buried them in Tjilatjap, Java.

Marcello: And this happened during that period while you were on convoy duty, is that correct?

Burge: We were on convoy duty. They got the Marblehead; they just about sunk her. We don't know how in the world she

ever did survive, but she got back to the States.

Marcello: Now when was it that the Houston more or less moved into the area of the East Indies on a more or less permanent basis? Did this occur sometime in February of 1942? Were you there about a month or something like that before it was actually sunk?

Burge: Yes, that was just about it. I don't know the exact dates. We teamed up with the British and the Australians. It was A, B, C, D; we was under four flags, really, but the senior officer was a Dutch admiral. We'd never worked as a team before, and the Dutch . . . well, we'd send liaison officers to each ship to interpret our flags and our maneuvers and so on. They did pretty good. It's not right, probably, for me to say, because they're gone, but I think our captain was superior in naval maneuvers to anybody they had out there.

Marcello: We'll talk about this in a little while, because I think it becomes very important in this story. I assume that the whole time you're down there in that area, you have virtually no air support at all or no air cover.

Burge: No.

Marcello: The Japanese had complete control of the air.

Burge: They had the air. We'd go on a convoy like the one we went on to Timor. Somebody in Australia said, "Oh, go

ahead. Man, we'll protect you. Well send out fighters." Well, there was forty-five of them that bombed us for about two hours out there, and they weren't after the transports so much. I think there was one merchant sailor that got killed on a transport. He was standing up there leaning over the side, and a piece of shrapnel hit him from a bomb blast. But after the forty-five of them had dropped all their bombs and left, one lone P-40 come from someplace and cut a circle; you just could see him on the horizon. That was about the most air cover I ever seen over there.

Marcello: What does it feel like being under those air attacks?

Burge: Well, there's no place to run, and there's no place to dig a foxhole. You just trust in the Lord, is about all you can do (chuckle). There ain't no place to run.

Marcello: Now, where did you say your battle station was located?

Burge: Well, I was in the after engine room for two hours, and then you went two hours in the aftermidship repair party. The night we were sunk, I had just came out of the engine room. A torpedo hit down there eventually, and everybody in the engine room was killed. The good Lord had a liking for me, I guess (chuckle). He just kind of put me in the right place at the right time.

Marcello: Now during this particular period, that is, the period in

February, the Houston received the nickname of the "Gal-
loping Ghost of the Java Coast." Now how did that parti-
cular name come about?

Burge: Well, I guess the Japanese put out the word that they'd
sunk us about seven different times. Every time we were
in action, they sunk us. Old Tokyo Rose, she would announce
that we'd been sunk and so on. So we just eventually
became . . . well, I don't know whether it came from our
ship. It was in our ship's paper; they called us the
"Gallopng Ghost of the Java Coast," which we were. We
was sunk, and then the next day we'd show up someplace
else (chuckle), you know, and fight them again.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the Battle of the Java Sea,
because in a way, I guess, that's the beginning of the
end for the Houston, so to speak. I think it probably
started--when--about February 27th or something like that,
somewhere along those lines.

Burge: Somewhere in there.

Marcello: Describe the Houston's role in the Battle of the Java Sea
as best you can piece it together.

Burge: Well, being down below decks, you don't know what's going on.
The only fighting that I saw in World War II was when I stuck
my head up and looked out of the hatch one time. I saw ships
afame and ships going down. That was when the Tromp and

the DeRuyter, a Dutch destroyer and a light cruiser or something, were on fire, and there was a Japanese ship on fire. All I had was just this one flash, and I said, "It's time I get my head down! The less I know, the better off I am!" I stayed down below decks.

Marcello: What sort of damage did the Houston sustain during that Battle of the Java Sea?

Burge: Well, aside from near-misses and springing a few leaks and busting a few rivets--I haven't studied up on this in a long time--I think we got two dud torpedoes. We got a shell hit forward, and it went through the ship up on the forecastle, two staterooms, and out the other side without exploding. Those dud torpedoes, they didn't go off; they ruptured a fuel oil tank on the port side aft, I remember that. We didn't get hurt too awful bad that time.

Marcello: In other words, the Houston was pretty lucky during that Battle of the Java Sea.

Burge: We was pretty lucky up until the last minute.

Marcello: By this time, are you beginning to get just a little bit more respect for the fighting prowess of the Japanese Navy?

Burge: We didn't give it much thought; we were just getting prouder of the ship we was on, that's all. We were beginning to think that we were indestructible.

Marcello: Also, as you mentioned awhile ago, the Houston took two dud torpedo hits at this time. But I think we also have to mention that the torpedoes the Japanese were using were kind of a rude surprise for a great many people at that time, too.

Burge: Well, where you have cruisers firing at you, they're supposed to be escorted by destroyers. Destroyers back then, they all had . . . there wasn't any of this guided missile stuff, you know, and they all had torpedoes. No, I wasn't too surprised. We were in their home waters, you might say, and whatever they had we expected.

Marcello: Like we mentioned awhile ago, with air cover and reconnaissance and so on and so forth, the Japanese knew where you were just about all the time.

Burge: Just about all the time. About the time you thought you was hid at night, they dropped a few flares. They might not fire or bomb or anything else; they'd just drop flares to let you know that they knew where you were, you know.

Marcello: Now granted, you were an enlisted man at this time, and am I to assume that morale was still so high that you thought that you were going to come out of this thing pretty much in one place?

Burge: Sure! Back then you didn't have officers like they had during the war and after the war and today; they'd all been to the Naval Academy, you know. Back then, we called it a "\$10,000 education"; I don't know where the figure stands today, but you had respect for them. They all knew their job; they'd all been to war college, you know, the higher ranked ones. They was just about as educated as a person could get for the job they had to do.

Marcello: You spoke awhile ago with a great deal of admiration about your captain. Rooks, I believe his name was.

Burge: Right.

Marcello: Evidently, as you mentioned, you had a great deal of confidence in his seamanship.

Burge: All the confidence in the world. I think every man aboard did. You'd get forty-five bombers coming at you, and he'd lay down on his back and watch them through his binoculars and call out commands so that you didn't get bombed. Well, pretty soon there ain't no way you can go but have all the respect in the world for him. I think he was the best four-striper there ever was.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk a little bit, then, about the end of the Houston. We're probably up now to about March 2, 1942. Describe the sinking of the Houston as best you can remember, being down in the engine room and so on.

Burge: Well, we thought we had it made.

Marcello: This was after the Battle of the Java Sea.

Burge: Yes. We went into Batavia and stayed a day and fueled. We had an awful time getting the fuel; there was a lot of communist activity or sabotage or whatever you want to call it. There was valves closed off in the fields and all this stuff, and they had to go out and search to get the pipelines going.

The way we understood it, a Dutch reconnaissance plane came in and said, "There is no Japanese within a thousand miles of here." So we were going to Australia and get fixed up and repair the damage and so on. Us and the Australian cruiser Perth, we were to go one way; and what destroyers we had left and I think a Dutch ship was left were going through the Bali Straits.

So I just come out of the engine room and got cleaned up again--I had my bunk up topside--and they sounded general quarters. So I went down to the aftermidship repair station, and that's when it got pretty heavy. We'd had enough hits by then that we were out of electricity for the hoists, so we was cranking these 5-inch shells up by hand. It was so hot, and you wore this flash-proof clothing--it's kind of dungaree material--with straps around your wrists and around your ankles and a hood and all this stuff.

It was about 125 or 130 degrees; there was no air down there. This mess deck got real slippery, so we laid mattresses out across it to walk on to keep from falling. So I got a big . . . well, we all got shells laying on these mattresses clear up the hoist and people cranking as fast as they can; we'd take turns. The ship's rolling pretty heavy, and I laid down across these 5-inch shells on this mattress. That's when the torpedo hit the after engine room right under us.

Marcello: Describe what it feels like to be hit by a torpedo.

Burge: Well, I think that was a 2-inch steel deck. Like I say, I was laying on these 5-inch shells holding them in place. Me and those shells and mattresses went . . . it seemed like we went all the way to the overhead, but probably it was a foot off of the deck. Then we came back down again. It puts a kink in your stomach.

Marcello: And one of those torpedoes leaves a very, very big hole in the side of the ship.

Burge: It wiped out the whole engine room. Of course, it ruptured the steam lines and so on.

Marcello: I guess this is the torpedo that scalded all those people down in that engine room when the steam lines burst.

Burge: Right. I tried to get a hatch open there. That was my engine room, you know; that's where I was assigned, and

they was all good buddies down there. The dogs on the hatch were so hot that you couldn't touch them; it'd just tear your skin off. Then if you'd got that open, which was lucky I didn't, all the steam would have come out where we were and killed a bunch more people. But right off the bat, you just think, "See if you can get your buddies out," you know. But then after you get that hatch open, you've got this battle guard with about two or three more inches of steel that's . . . well, it's got pieces carved out of it, you know. But still, it's a battle guard, they call it; it'll stop just about anything going down in there. We'd have had that to get up, and it was buckled. So it was just one of those things.

Marcello: So you're down below decks, and it must be rather unnerving to know that all this activity is going on above decks and you really can't do too much about it.

Burge: No, I think it's a blessing. If you'd seen what was going on upstairs, you'd be scared to death, you know. I know we picked up two submarine sailors down in the South Seas there someplace that their submarine had been sunk--Americans. They wouldn't go down in the mess halls to eat. They said, "If you knew what was going on below this ocean, you wouldn't be down below decks. You'd be up here where you can get off." Well, that's the same way if you're down there to begin with . . .

see, I never went back up and looked after that Java Sea Battle that night; I said, "That's enough of that for me. That's their job up there; I'll stay down here and do mine." So really, you don't give it much thought until it comes in on you.

Marcello: Now was there an abandon ship order given?

Burge: They ordered abandon ship, and the majority of us didn't believe it, and we didn't go. We just kept these shells going, see. But finally, well, then after the first abandon ship order was given, they said, "Back to your battle stations!" Then again, after awhile they said, "Abandon ship." Well, we went then.

Marcello: Describe your process of leaving the Houston.

Burge: Well, I only had one ladder to go up onto the fantail past this number three turret that was out. I got up there, and she was listing pretty bad, and the deck was full of holes and so on. Of course, prior to that, now we'd carried powder from the number three turret the length of the ship up to numbers one and two turrets. That may have been in the Java Sea Battle; I don't recall which it was. But I think it was the night we got sunk that we did a lot of that transporting of powder bags. You know, with 8-inch powder bags--one on each shoulder--and walking up through and shrapnel flying through the side

of the ship and stuff, well, you just don't look out; you ignore it. You've got a job to do, and you keep on going, you know.

Marcello: So when you get up on deck, is discipline still being maintained pretty well? Is everything being done in a rather orderly manner, that is, so far as abandoning ship is concerned?

Burge: Yes. There are people letting the lifeboats loose and this, that, and the other.

Marcello: In the meantime, is the Houston still firing, or has it ceased firing by this time?

Burge: They're firing manually what they can, some of them. There was still machine guns going when I left, and I didn't leave until the last minute.

Marcello: Okay, describe what you did then when you got out on deck.

Burge: Well, to just show you the old Navy discipline, I . . . of course, I'd always had this new lifejacket stashed down there, and I took it with me everyplace I went. When I went to get it, it was gone. So I went up on deck, and I found one. I went back on the fantail, and I did everything just like they told me. I took my dungarees off, and I took my shoes off; I set them side-by-side, put my socks in them, took my dungarees off and folded them up, and laid them on top of my shoes just like I was going to bed, see.

This is just discipline that goes with it. Then I went over to the side and took my lifejacket off. You're not supposed to jump in with it on; you hold onto it over your head when you go in. I went back behind the screws where I wouldn't get chopped up and jumped in. I thought I never would come up, but I did.

Marcello: Was the sea full of oil by this time?

Burge: Oh, yes. Yes, there was oil. I was, again, more fortunate than a lot of them, because after I swam through oil, I swam through diesel fuel, and it washed a lot of the crude oil off of me.

Marcello: So in other words, when you went into the water, you were in fuel oil first of all?

Burge: Yes.

Marcello: And then later on, you went through . . .

Burge: . . . this diesel oil. And it washed an awful lot of it off of me.

Marcello: What was the temperature of the water like? Was it hot? Cold? Do you recall?

Burge: Oh, it was . . . well, at a time like that, you don't notice it, but it was nice. I'd say it was temperate. There was no uncomfortable feeling of cold or heat--either one.

But I knew I had to get away from the ship, because

that's what they always told you--to get away from the suction. I made it to a liferaft, and there were a bunch of people on it. There was one old boy out of the fireroom there, and he said he was hurt pretty bad. I helped him in, but he was burned so bad that the flesh came off in your hands, you know, but I got him in there. About that time, a Jap destroyer come by and started strafing us. I said, "Well, this ain't no place for me!" I just struck out on my own.

Marcello: So in other words, you got away from that raft.

Burge: I got away from that raft and got out just about where there wasn't anybody. But there was a light that you could see up on this mountain. What it was was for the Japs to take their bearing on for their landing parties, because they was already landing there; they had been since the day before.

So there's supposedly seven currents in the Sunda Strait, and they never go to sea. I'd keep my eye on the light, and I'd swim or float or whatever to keep going. As I'd start going one way, I'd angle my body, and I'd let the currents work for me. Well, that little lifejacket was making me sore on my chest--rubbing--so I took it off, and I was going to put it under me, you know, under my stomach and use it for buoyancy. Well, when I took it

off, it sunk. It was an old side cleaner's jacket; I'd been carrying it ever since I got in the water. It hadn't helped me any (chuckle). So I was better off without it.

Marcello: So now you're out there in the water without a lifejacket at all, right?

Burge: Right. So you swim awhile and you float awhile, and you watch this light, this beacon.

Marcello: Are you getting any closer to shore?

Burge: Well, you like to think you are. I actually was, but I didn't know it at the time. So eventually, I run into another guy, Weeks--I think he's dead now--from Salinas, California. We went along there awhile together talking about it. He hadn't seen anybody else, and I'd just seen that one raft full.

Marcello: Did he have a lifejacket?

Burge: He had a lifejacket.

Marcello: Were you kind of clinging together?

Burge: Oh, no. No, I was doing all right. I wasn't tired.

Marcello: Were you a pretty strong swimmer?

Burge: Well, in salt water you don't have to be too strong a swimmer. You can float and relax and rest up, you know. Oh, it came up a little shower there. It was a moonlit night, if I remember, about a half-moon. You know, these tropical squalls came along, and I just laid over on my

back and got all the water I could in my mouth and rinsed off what I could. You know, that fresh water seemed to help; it made you feel better. I went on by myself until just about daylight.

Well, it was coming dawn, and I could hear the waves hitting the beach. I thought, "Boy, I've got it made." Well, about that time, here comes a raft full of horses-- a barge. They had an outboard motor on it. It was the Japs landing their infantry. So they threw a lifejacket on a rope out to me and trained their guns on me. I thought, "Well, they're giving me a chance," so I took the lifejacket, and they pulled me in. Of course, they inspected me inside and out and told me to go over there and sit down, and we kept on going.

Marcello: I assume they did not rough you up or anything at this point.

Burge: No, these were just a couple of little old "no-star" Japanese soldiers, you know.

Marcello: How long had you been in the water by this time?

Burge: Well, I don't know what time it came daylight over there. I was in the water about five hours, I guess, or something.

Marcello: Were you pretty tired by the time you got aboard that barge?

Burge: Well, you're just wondering what's going to happen next. What will be will be. I mean, they didn't shoot me in the water, and that was a point in my favor. I was up in this

barge and out of the water, so I figured I was doing pretty good.

Marcello: Are you the only prisoner aboard this barge?

Burge: I was then. Then we got a little farther in, and I seen a seaman from the forecastle gang up there, Arnold Schwartz. You've probably heard of him. He's up in Newark, New Jersey, in the post office. I said, "Hey, Arnold, I've been on here for five minutes, and they ain't shot me yet!" He said, "Well, tell them people to come over here and get me!" So I said, "Go get him," you know, in motions, and they went by and got him and took us to the beach.

Marcello: So what happens when you get on the beach?

Burge: Well, they tied us up back-to-back--made us sit down and tied us up back-to-back and tied our hands together.

Marcello: Now you're in your skivvy shorts.

Burge: That's all I've got--skivvy shorts. They brought some little officer out there that could speak pretty good broken English. He'd been to the States, which an awful lot of them that you'd run into later on had. He said, "You have loved ones? Mama and papa and sweetheart and wife," or something. "Sure do." Well, he pulls that old cheese knife out there, you know, and gives a few flourishes and says, "If you lie, you die! I want to know how many

battleships are out there." So we told him, "No battleships." He took the sword and tickled your throat a little bit with it, you know, and squeezed it around. "You lie! Battleships! Battleships!" Well, he kept this up, and he was pushing pretty heavy on that sword. He'd work on me awhile, and he'd work on Schwartz awhile, see.

Finally, I said, "Well, dammit, if he wants battleships, let's give him battleships!" Well, we gave him every battleship that was sunk in Pearl Harbor and every one we ever knew of that was out of service. It just tickled him to death. Boy, he was writing just as fast as he can. He got about eight or nine listed there and was just tickled plumb to death. He hollered at some other officer up there and told these guards standing around to untie us. They got us some canned salmon and a drink of sake and some Japanese cigarettes. We was on their side; he'd really got all the information out of us, you know (chuckle).

Marcello: Were you pretty hungry by this time?

Burge: Yes, it was breakfast time (chuckle), especially with a guy that liked to eat all the time, anyway.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens at that point now?

Burge: Well, they fed us. Those old soldiers opened up their rice--

they carried a little bamboo bag of rice, you know-- and they opened it up and gave us some rice to go with our salmon and a drink of sake to drink it down with and some of their cigarettes, which left a lot to be desired. But it tasted darn good that morning. After a while, well, there was two or three more POW's who showed up then. They loaded these ammo carts--two-wheeled carts with big bicycle tires on; they had shafts on them, you know, just like a rickshaw freight train, I guess--and we started hauling ammo.

Marcello: Now how many of you were there altogether here now?

Burge: Well, I'm going to say twenty-five, because I think . . . the reason I'm saying this is that they kept showing up and so on, and they'd put us in these shafts pulling this ammunition. When we got to some little place outside of Batavia . . .

Marcello: Was it Serang?

Burge: No, I didn't go to Serang. But they put the . . . I think there was twenty-five . . . there was twenty-one Americans, and then there was a coastwatcher or two. I believe there was twenty-seven of us that wound up in what they said was a doctor's office. It was just, well, a room maybe this long (gesture) and just wide enough that when you laid down, your feet was under the armpits of the guy

laying across from you. They kept us there about two weeks.

Marcello: Well, let's just back up here a minute. Now you said that they had interrogated you and when they were satisfied that you were telling them all that you knew, you then began to haul this ammunition. Now was this ammunition being hauled from the barges inland?

Burge: Yes, yes.

Marcello: About how long did you do this?

Burge: Oh, about two or three days.

Marcello: Was it fairly hard work?

Burge: Well, when you've soaked your feet in salt . . . when you haven't been barefoot in a couple of years and soaked your feet all night in salt water and get out on these roads with crushed rock on them, it seems like a lifetime. They didn't give us too many rests. You asked me a while ago if I was tired. When they stopped to break there in the nights--we went twenty-four hours a day--I laid down in a mudhole, and I got me some good rest right on the rocks and the mud, see. So I guess I was tired about that time.

Marcello: About how many of you were there manning each one of these carts?

Burge: Oh, just one and a Japanese guard. I think the guards were

supposed to be pulling theirselves, but they found us so they put us in the shafts.

Marcello: You, in effect, were pulling these carts as a coolie would be pulling a rickshaw, like you mentioned awhile ago.

Burge: Right.

Marcello: Now did the Japanese harass you at all while you were hauling this ammunition?

Burge: No, the soldiers that were with us . . . I found out later that there was probably a lot more survivors off the ship, but there was a price on our head. The only way you was going to survive was to stay with the Japs, because these natives'd cut your head off or your ears or something--anything white that could prove that they had killed you--for twenty-five guilders or whatever the price was, you know. So the only safe place to be was with the Japs. Sometimes a native'd come up and try to let the guard take you off in the jungle. Well, no way; he'd keep you with him, because he knew what would happen. Then he'd have to pull the cart.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese did not harass you in terms of physically abusing you or anything of this sort. There was no hitting or shoving or this sort of thing.

Burge: Oh, well, a certain amount of it. Some of the guys'd get tired and fall down or something; well, they'd try to

rifle-butt them up, you know, or kick them up until they got them going again. Personally, I don't remember being touched there.

Marcello: What were your impressions of these Japanese soldiers at this time?

Burge: Well, they weren't bothering you; you was just wondering when they was going to, you know, when it was going to be your turn. We figured that when we got this ammo wherever they wanted to go, they were going to shoot us anyway, so it didn't make us any difference.

Marcello: I was going to ask you if you ever heard the rumor that the Japanese did not take prisoners.

Burge: No, I hadn't heard it. But when I seen them shooting them out there in the water and, you know, strafing, this is why I figured whenever we get where we're going, this was the end of it, you know. You have all kinds of thoughts.

Marcello: Do you have any thoughts of escape?

Burge: We had hopes of it; we figured we'd get away. But after we found out that we had 44,000 natives wanting the reward for our head, why, we decided we'd do better to stay where we were, that escape will come later, you know.

Marcello: Now you mentioned you're hauling this ammunition for about two days?

Burge: Something like that.

Marcello: Now where do you go from this point?

Burge: They put us in this doctor's office--the bunch we had-- and they left eight soldiers there to watch us--a sergeant and his squad. They didn't have anything to eat, and we didn't either. They got hold of some cracked corn some place, and they boiled it up. No matter how long you boiled it, you couldn't chew it, you know; you just swallowed it. One day we found a snake; we killed it and ate it.

Marcello: Now this is while you're still being quartered here in this doctor's office?

Burge: In this doctor's office. So we ate the snake, and some of the natives going by seen us. We woke up the next morning, and there was a big old pile of snakes out there. Everybody that knew where there was a snake, they brought it over and tossed it up there by the door for us so we'd have something to eat, you know.

Marcello: In other words, you were hungry enough at this point that you were resorting to snakes and so on.

Burge: Well, when there's nothing else, they were good. The thing was was all these goats running around there. We kept telling that Jap guard, "Them goats are good to eat." Well, when they got hungry enough, too, he said, "All right. Kill one of them." So we killed one of them right fast; in about five minutes we had it in a five-gallon bucket boiling

him, see. This old sergeant come up and he watched us, and everybody was going at it like it's a rare delicacy, which it was right then, and he wanted to know if he could have a little piece of it. So we gave him a bite, and he liked it; so he wanted some more. So from then on . . . of course, like I was talking about walking on these rocks, some of the people could hardly stand up for the blisters on their feet and so on, you know. He'd stick his head in the door and holler, "Baaa! Ten men, good feet." He wanted you to go out and chase down another goat.

This went on for about a week, I guess, and the natives got wise to all their goats disappearing. So everytime you'd see a goat out there, you'd see a little kid up on its back riding it while it ate, you know. They'd just turn them out loose and let them eat off the vegetation. So that was about the end. By that time, we got a little rice and stuff in, and bananas. But all the time we was there, they wouldn't let us have a drink of water.

Marcello: So how did you get water then?

Burge: They'd take work details out and chop coconuts. We got a ration of coconut juice to drink everyday, and then we'd eat the coconut out of the shell. That was the main thing we got there.

Marcello: What sort of work did you do while you were at this so-called doctor's office?

Burge: Aside from going out to get coconuts, nothing. They kept us right there where they knew where . . . you know, they didn't give you any chance to get away from them.

Marcello: And how many of you were there at this time?

Burge: I believe totally with the English and Australians . . . and there was one or two Dutch--like I say, coastwatchers. I think it was twenty-seven of us.

Marcello: How long were you there altogether?

Burge: About two weeks. Because one guy got dysentery real bad, and they put him down in a little old shed down in a place to die. So it wasn't but a few days later, he come walking back in; he was all right. Some old native had found him. Yarrow root is a whole lot equivalent to our white sweet potatoes, and he started feeding him those boiled, and back he come. He's alive. Crayton Gordon just got his address here a while back.

But later on, they took us on up to a place called Rangas Batan and put us in a regular prison up there. They served us some of that baked every morning for breakfast, so, shoot . . . I don't know. I've got information around here someplace about how long we were there. It had bars on it, and they had Javanese and Indian prisoners in there,

and so. I suppose it was like one of our state penitentiaries or something. It was just a one-story affair. Those people being short, they had built platforms out of two-by-fours and then a two-by-four rafter for a pillow and a two-by-four across the bottom to keep him from sliding off, because they were on a slope. Well, those people were about four-and-a-half to five feet tall, and when you put a bunch of six-footers on there (chuckle), you'd have to sleep kind of scrunched up, you know.

Marcello: Now how long were you at this prison, so to speak?

Burge: Well, I would say about three weeks, because the other people had been in Serang in that theatre for over a month. Man, we was fat when we walked in there compared to them; they had had pure hell in that theatre in Serang.

Marcello: Now what did you do while you were at this prison or at this jail?

Burge: There again, they just kept us locked up. They'd take one man at a time and go out to the rest room or go get a bucket of water and so on like that, you know. That was it; the rest of the time you just stayed right in there.

Marcello: But as you mentioned, you were eating fairly well at this point yet.

Burge: Well, we weren't doing anything. If we got a piece of yarrow root for breakfast and a rice ball in the evening,

that was all it took. But these old boys in that place up there at Serang, they weren't getting that much to eat.

Marcello: Now were the Japanese doing the cooking, or were you doing your own cooking here?

Burge: They were doing it and bringing it to us.

Marcello: Like you say, there were only twenty-five or thirty of you here.

Burge: Right.

Marcello: So they were not having to feed too many people, actually.

Burge: No. They were getting some supplies in.

Marcello: How was your own health holding up at this point?

Burge: Oh, I was doing all right.

Marcello: You'd been a prisoner now for a little over a month, I guess, by the time you left this jail.

Burge: Right. I probably dropped twenty or twenty-five pounds, but I felt all right.

Marcello: Were you able to scrounge any additional clothing or anything, or were you still in your skivvy shorts?

Burge: I was still wearing skivvy shorts. We didn't get any clothing until we got into Batavia with the 131st, and they shared with us what they could.

Marcello: In other words, you had no shoes or long trousers or anything at this stage yet.

Burge: No. And I had my raggediest old pair of shorts on
(chuckle) when the ship went down, too.

Marcello: I assume that you had no other sort of utensils or anything
of that nature at this point, either.

Burge: No. We'd take a coconut with the husk off and bounce
it on the concrete just round and round, and eventually
it'd split straight open. Then you got a bowl. Then you
break another piece off the other side of the coconut,
and you got a spoon and that's your utensils.

I did pick up a fez, I guess you call them--one of
them turbans that the people wear that's been to Mecca.
It was laying alongside the road; it'd been discarded.
I thought, "Well, I'll find something for that," because
we slept with our head on this concrete. It began to feel
like them coconuts; it was going to bust open anytime,
you know. So, boy, I tucked it under my head that night,
and I hadn't any sooner got laid down--of course, there's
no lights--than I got stung right there on the cheek.
There was a centipede in there, and that "dude" laid it to
me. It was about as hot as a hornet, but it got all right.

Marcello: Now while you're at this jail, are the Japanese more or less
letting you alone? In other words, are they harassing
you at all here?

Burge: No, they just wanted us to stay in there and keep quiet;

that's the main thing.

Marcello: How long is the war going to last at this stage, so far as you're concerned?

Burge: Well, we figured six months was going to be the length of it, you know. "You can put up with this for awhile. Shoot, in six months we're going to be out of here, and everything's going to be all right."

Marcello: Okay, so you mentioned that you're here for a couple or three weeks, and then is it at this point that they move you into Batavia to Bicycle Camp?

Burge: Yes, they took us on into Batavia then.

Marcello: How far away from Batavia are you?

Burge: I have no idea.

Marcello: How did you get to Batavia?

Burge: They loaded us on trucks and took us down there.

Marcello: And I assume this is a rather uneventful journey?

Burge: Well, it was as uneventful as you could be on six miles of mud roads that'd bounce you around a little bit. The guards are as scared of us as we are of them, you know. They kept you pretty much under surveillance with the end of their guns and bayonets and stuff.

Marcello: I've heard it said that these Japanese soldiers appeared to be rather scruffy-looking to the Americans and so on.

Burge: They were. They have belly bands, and one size shoe fits

everybody--tennis shoes. They'd tie a string around their pants legs and so on to keep the dust out. It was a different army than ours undoubtedly, but they'd had a rough row. They'd been marching. I've seen them, though, that if they had to wash their clothes in a mudhole, they'd wash the sweat out of them before they'd go to bed at night. They carried drums and had a wooden platform built. If they had time--regular oil drum--they'd fill it up with water and light a fire under it. They'd all get in that--to me, it was boiling water--and take them a bath. They were cleaner than a lot of people gave them credit for; they tried to be under the circumstances.

Marcello: Describe what Bicycle Camp's like from a physical standpoint.

Burge: Well, it was another world after where we'd been. It was a Dutch barracks and had cubicles in it. The Dutch army let their natives . . . , these were all native quarters, you know, native soldiers--Javanese. The way I understood it, their families could live with them. It was dry, and we all eventually got rice sacks and made us bunks out of them on the walls and so on. So everybody had an individual bunk, and it was about six people to a cubicle and guards at each end.

When a guard'd come through, why, you had to holler

"Attention" and all this stuff, you know. If somebody didn't get up, why, and didn't bow . . . you had to bow to them.

Marcello: Now is the 131st Field Artillery at Bicycle Camp when you arrive, or do they come in later?

Burge: I believe that they were already there, or they brought them in about the same time from that Serang prison up there where they'd been. I don't know; there was so much confusion and newness to it all. There was some Aussies already there; they were pretty well set up.

Marcello: Ultimately, Bicycle Camp turns out to be a rather large camp, does it not?

Burge: They brought everybody in there . . . the Aussies and the English and Americans--131st--you know, and all.

Marcello: I guess you guys off the Houston were a rather scruffy-looking outfit, were you not?

Burge: I imagine we were about as scruffy as anybody they'd ever seen (chuckle).

Marcello: Were you still kind of dirty and so on and so forth, or had you managed to get all that oil off your body?

Burge: Well, I was fortunate in not having any fuel at all hardly on me after swimming through so much of that diesel oil. But some of them, it burned them where they peeled. It went two or three layers deep; they was a

pretty scroungy-looking bunch of "dudes."

Marcello: Describe your first encounter with the members of the 131st Field Artillery.

Burge: Well, we just got together and talked and found out their experiences, and they found out ours. We didn't know they were there, and they didn't know we were there, so we all had a lot to talk about.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that there was common sharing here. You obviously didn't have very much to share with them, of course, but they did share their clothing and so on with you.

Burge: What they could spare. I mean, they had to look out for themselves, you know. They didn't have too much. They weren't outfitted, I wouldn't say, like a regular Army, you know. They just had maybe one or two pairs of shoes and so on; they didn't have enough to go around.

Marcello: Did you manage to get any clothing or shoes?

Burge: I didn't right then. Then when we got up in the jungle, they were getting so low that about all of us was wearing G-strings.

Marcello: In other words, here at Bicycle Camp, you didn't receive any additional clothing over what you'd had when you came in.

Burge: I didn't at first, no. Some of them did. I was comfortable; I mean, I didn't need any clothes, really.

Marcello: But you had no long trousers or any shoes or anything of that sort.

Burge: No.

Marcello: Even at this early stage.

Burge: No.

Marcello: Okay, describe what the food was like here at Bicycle Camp.

Burge: Well, it wasn't too bad. It was rice. It wasn't our diet, but we'd have rice and some kind of stew or something.

I got yellow jaundice there, and the doctor said it was the grease off of pork. The Japs . . . a hog to them is the hams and shoulders, and they'd just skin it out. So they was letting us have the rest of it, and we'd put it in these drums and boil it up, you know. Naturally, there's an awful lot of fat on it, but we figured we needed anything we could get, so you just put it on your rice and eat it.

No, we had plenty of food, such as it was, in Bicycle Camp, I guess. I don't remember being hungry. They didn't feed you that well or that often, but still you got a big dip of rice and a dipper of whatever they had boiling in the barrel.

Marcello: Now by this time, do you have any eating utensils, or are you still using the coconut and so on?

Burge: Well, I held on to my coconut for quite a long time. Finally, we'd find tin cans and half-gallon or gallon buckets and stuff like that, you know. Everybody learned to scrounge (chuckle). Whatever you run across belonged to you, you know.

Marcello: I gather that sooner or later every prisoner became a scavenger, so to speak. Any item, no matter how inconsequential, could possibly have some future value to you.

Burge: It could always be made into something, or somebody would trade you an egg for it or something when you run across them, you know. Nothing went to waste. If it was material, why, you'd make a G-string out of it, you know. If you had enough for two, why, you'd give one to your buddy and so on like that.

Marcello: Who was cooking the food here at Bicycle Camp?

Burge: I believe the 131st cooks were taking care of it there.

Marcello: Did they have a very hard time learning how to cook that rice?

Burge: It always tasted good to me. We had a cook off the ship--he's dead now--and he was an old China Hand. He cooked the rice in what they called big Y-johns. They were about three feet across and maybe a foot deep, kind of shallowed out. You'd cook your rice in there with a big wooden cover on it. They made good steamed rice. The best of it was

what had stuck to the bottom. When they'd take the rice out, you know, then you'd get that burnt rice, and that was good.

Marcello: How was the quality of the rice here? In other words, was it the sweepings off of the warehouse floors? Was it wormy or anything of that nature?

Burge: I didn't pay any attention to it there. When we got up in the jungle, it got to be halfrocks and worms, but down there it wasn't bad. When I had that yellow jaundice, which is hepatitis now, all I could have to eat was the water from the first washing of the rice and a pound of granulated sugar every day. I got well, so I guess that's why. You know, the water would be real starchy from where they'd wash the rice, and there was trash in it. It was very unpalatable, but I wasn't going to get anything else. The doctor said, "Drink it," so I drank it.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about your bout with yellow jaundice. I assume that you came down with this very shortly after you arrived at Bicycle Camp.

Burge: Yes, I hadn't been there maybe a couple of weeks.

Marcello: Did you have to go to sickbay?

Burge: I did eventually, because I was starving to death. Everytime I'd get up there and smell that stuff, I'd get so sick I couldn't face going through the chow line. When it gets

so you can't eat at all, I went and made sick call and told them how I was. Of course, by that time, I was yellow and my eyeballs were yellow and everything; it wasn't hard for them to tell what I had. But we had no medication, so that's when they gave me this diet of rice water and granulated sugar.

Marcello: Evidently, granulated sugar was relatively easy to come by.

Burge: I don't know where they got it in the hospital. We didn't have it on the mess line or anything, but they had it there.

Marcello: Describe what the hospital facilities were like here at Bicycle Camp.

Burge: Well, we just had a make-shift bunk and nothing to go with it, you know. There wasn't any such thing as aspirins or bed pans or anything else that I know of. They just put you off here in this room so that you didn't spread it; it was isolation, I guess you'd call it. You sat there and stared at the wall until time to drink your rice water again.

Marcello: Is this more or less an atap-type hut that you're in?

Burge: It seemed to me like all those buildings had that red tile on them, if I'm not mistaken, in Java.

Marcello: So you really don't get the atap buildings until you get

up into the jungle, I guess.

Burge: When you get up into the jungle, then everything is atap.

Marcello: How long were you in this hospital altogether?

Burge: Just four or five days.

Marcello: Did it appear to be a relatively sanitary place and so on?

Burge: Not to our standards, but they did the best they could with what they had. It was American doctors and Dutch doctors and so on like that, so the Japs didn't have anything to do with us in there. But their idea of toilet tissue is a bottle of water.

Marcello: Well, let's talk a little bit about the toilet and shower facilities here at Bicycle Camp. You've just mentioned the subject, so let's pursue it a little bit farther.

Burge: Well, there were spigots here and there with running water in them, and it had a high sulfur content. I got an ulcer started on my leg from scratching a mosquito bite, I guess. Anyway, it was a break in the skin, and it got about as big around as your little fingernail. I just started letting that water run in it, and it cured it up. Well, it tasted like sulfur, you know, brackish and sulfurish.

The Dutch commodes are just a hole in the floor with two foot tracks in concrete up there. You'd squat down there, and then they had bottles of water lined up

there, and you'd wash yourself off with it. It was different, but you get used to anything, you know, when there's no other way to go.

Marcello: What were the shower and bathing facilities like here at Bicycle Camp?

Burge: Well, you just got your mess gear--I think they gave us a little salt water soap there, too--and you'd just wet down and soap down and rinse off.

Marcello: In other words, you really did not have showers as we know them? You were still using these spigots and so on that were scattered throughout the camp?

Burge: I guess they did have showers someplace there, but I don't recall them. The bad things you don't remember. Now when we get together at these conventions, I'll run into somebody like Schwartz. He didn't remember us being interrogated when we got to the beach until just a few years ago. I was telling him about it one time--if he remembered it--and he didn't remember that. When I told him, it became perfectly clear to him. That's the way with our showers and stuff. It wasn't too bad or I'd remember it, see. But there are some things . . . any day you'll talk to somebody, "Do you remember this?" "No." Then they'll ask me do I remember that--"No." But when they tell you about it, it'll all come back to you.

Marcello: As you recall, were you able to keep relatively clean here at Bicycle Camp?

Burge: Oh, yes. Yes, yes.

Marcello: Could you take baths with a certain degree of frequency? Were there any restrictions on this sort of thing?

Burge: No. I just remember this one spigot that I always used; it stuck about three feet out of the ground on a pipe. But they never shut the water off or anything.

Marcello: Did you go on work parties while you were in Bicycle Camp?

Burge: Yes, we had some details there. I don't remember just how long we were there. But I know they'd take us out in trucks; it wasn't very far. There were so many people with guards. We'd have different jobs to do. I don't really remember much about the outside details until we got up to Singapore.

Marcello: Is it safe to say, then, that the work parties that went out of Bicycle Camp were sporadic or infrequent and things of that nature? In other words, you individually would not be going out every day on a work party as such.

Burge: No. No.

Marcello: Did some people volunteer to go out on work parties in order to relieve the monotony and boredom?

Burge: Oh, yes. Well, that and what you might be able to steal or pick up someplace, you know, to better yourself.

Marcello: Do you recall any of the sort of work that you did when

you went on these parties?

Burge: I get them confused with Saigon, but I believe that most of the work parties I remember . . . I believe there was a Dunlop Tire and Rubber Company there, and we'd go out and inventory tires and motor spare parts and stuff like that. It wasn't too much of that pick-and-shovel work.

Marcello: I guess you were doing a lot of clean-up work and so on here from the war damage and so on.

Burge: Well, there hadn't been that much war damage at the time done in Batavia, I don't think. But they were collecting their loot, you know, and they wanted to know how many truck tires were in this stack and how many of these spare parts over here. Of course, we would sabotage them when we could . . . break the seals on the spare parts to where the air could get to them. Maybe if they wasn't watching you too close, you could take a leak over a bunch of them where they'd rust quicker. Or you'd get down inside these stacks of tires and try to cut them with a nail or whatever you could find, you know--mess them up where we could. But there again, we didn't figure they was going to use them, because we was going to get liberated anytime.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit about the Japanese guards here at

Bicycle Camp. I assume they still are Japanese guards at this point.

Burge: I think that they were still Japanese guards in Batavia.

Marcello: What sort of procedures did you have to follow in their presence?

Burge: If you smoked, you had to have a bucket with you all the time--something to put your cigarette out in. You had to carry that on your belt. You had to bow to them all the time; anytime that you seen them, you bowed to them.

Some of the old boys, if they didn't bow to them or got caught swiping something . . . if you followed their stupid rules--which seemed stupid to us--you got along pretty good there. The Japanese guards weren't anyway as near as ferocious as the Korean guards we got later on. They'd take guys and make them kneel with a bamboo behind their legs and stuff like that; face the sun for ten or fifteen . . . you know, as long as the sun was shining and maybe stay that way for overnight or something. It was pretty crippling; there wasn't anything permanent about it probably. They'd slap them around some.

Marcello: Now let's back up here a minute. When you talk about the guards placing the bamboo poles and so on behind the legs, you're referring to the Korean guards later on?

Burge: No, some of it was done at Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Oh, is that correct?

Burge: In Batavia, yes.

Marcello: What was the usual form of corporal punishment that might occur here at Bicycle Camp?

Burge: Well, as a rule, they kept them around the guardhouse. They'd hold a rock over their head or kneel them with this bamboo behind their knees or something like that. What we called "bashings" weren't too frequent by the Japs. They didn't work theirself up into a lather like the Koreans did later on, you know.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese, then, actually didn't beat you around too much here at Bicycle Camp.

Burge: It wasn't near as bad in Bicycle Camp as it got later on, no.

Marcello: Are there very many Japanese here at Bicycle Camp?

Burge: There seemed to be enough of them. They was everyplace you looked. We had a fence around us, of course, and everything.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that you tried to have as few relations with the Japanese guards as possible?

Burge: Oh, yes. You ignored them like the plague, because they were so easy to misunderstand. Then you was in trouble. The best thing you could do was just stay away from them.

Marcello: Well, now you mentioned something here, and maybe we need

to just pursue this a little bit farther. You mentioned that it was so easy for the prisoners or the Japanese guards to misunderstand one another's intentions. Is it perhaps safe to say that by hitting you or beating you the Japanese guard figured this was the only way he could make you understand what he wanted you to do? I hate to say it's a form of communication, but maybe that's what it was.

Burge: Well, it could have had something to do with it. It got your attention. It didn't take you near as long to learn benjo for restroom and mizu for water and things like that, you know.

Marcello: And is it safe to say that there were occasions when the prisoners actually asked for a beating or a slap or a kick or something?

Burge: It is if that's their form of punishment, and if you've been told that you'll have a can with you all the time if you're smoking a cigarette, or that you'll bow to them when you see them and all this stuff. If you got a little careless in any respect, why, that was their form of getting your attention.

Marcello: Did you observe that physical punishment was a way of life in the Japanese army?

Burge: Oh, yes, yes. If you see a colonel slap a captain in the

morning, you know that one of you is going to get it before night, because each one of them will save face. The captain, he gets the lieutenant, and the lieutenant gets the master sergeant, and the master sergeant gets the sergeant, and the sergeant gets the corporal. When you see a little "no-star" out there get it, why, he's going to look around until he finds a prisoner someplace doing something wrong, and he can beat on him before he goes to bed. That's the way they save face.

Marcello: I gather it wasn't too good an idea to try and get on friendly terms with any of the guards, because they could turn at anytime or would turn at anytime.

Burge: Well, I never had that much to do with them there in Bicycle Camp. They had their rules, and they was going to knock you around if you didn't obey them; so the best thing to do when you did come in contact with them was do like they asked and go about your business. If you got a little lax or got caught doing something you shouldn't, you got the punishment.

Marcello: Did they frequently inspect the barracks here at Bicycle Camp?

Burge: They were liable to walk through anytime; they walked through at regular intervals. There was one boy off

the ship that had an epileptic fit one time. He was a big old boy. He was bald-headed, and the soft spot had never healed in the top of his head; you could see his heart beat. He threw one fit, and it took a whole bunch of us to hold him down, because he was a big, strong old boy. The Japs come rushing up there with their rifles; they didn't know what was going on. When they seen his pulse beating in the top of his head and the antics he was going through and frothing and so on . . . and what we was trying to do was get his tongue out of his mouth and a stick in there so he wouldn't bite it and so on. From then on, when they heard a commotion like that, they didn't come around; boy, they'd just stay gone. They were scared to death of him.

Marcello: You mentioned that you had to carry this little bucket around with you for smoking purposes. Were the Japanese very, very fire conscious or afraid of fires and this sort of thing?

Burge: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. They live in fear of fire in Japan, because most of their buildings are wooden atap and highly flammable, you know. When one house catches on fire, that whole area's gone because they're so close together.

Marcello: Now are your officers acting more or less as go-betweens with the Japanese?

Burge: Yes.

Marcello: In other words, orders are coming from the Japanese commandant down to your officers, and then they're transferred on to the enlisted men.

Burge: Transferred on down to the enlisted men. You knew what to expect. If they made some stupid rule, they'd tell the officers and the officers'd call us together and tell us, "Don't forget it!" It was just that simple. If you did what they said, they let you alone.

Marcello: Now at one particular time here in Bicycle Camp, the Japanese forced everybody to sign the non-escape pledge. Do you remember that particular incident?

Burge: Oh, yes. Yes.

Marcello: Describe it.

Burge: Well, again, the word was passed down, "Go sign your name," or somebody else's name or whatever, you know. But this was when we first was going to get a record made of us. It didn't mean anything. Why get out there in the sun and get beat on for three or four days and then sign it anyway? You told each other, "Now I'm going to sign it, but I'm lying. My word's no good to these people." It was just a way of getting it over with, you know. We'd sent out a postcard one time.

Marcello: Here in Bicycle Camp?

Burge: In Bicycle Camp, I believe it was.

Marcello: Do you recall that postcard?

Burge: Well, it has been so long ago that I'm trying to keep it honest, but it seems to me like we did get to send one in Bicycle Camp. It just keeps coming back to me that we did get to send one that was already made up. You had to say, "I am well," and "I am a prisoner of the Japanese Imperial Army." The only thing that they let you do was put down one sentence, "I am with so-and-so friend." So I put down that I was with Elmo Kennedy, and Elmo Kennedy put down that he was with me, because our parents knew that we knew each other, see. So by getting one from him, they in turn could call my folks and tell them that I was all right, but none of these cards ever got back. I don't know whether it was just to make us feel better or what. I think it was in July of '45 that I think my mother got the first card from me.

Marcello: While you were in Bicycle Camp, were you receiving any news at all from the outside world?

Burge: Not legally.

Marcello: Let's pursue this subject a little bit farther.

Burge: Well, I don't know how they was getting it, really. It was real hush-hush, but we had a radio and we got news from some of the Dutch allies. It just filtered down,

you know, by word-of-mouth.

Marcello: I assume that you personally never saw the radios.

Burge: No. I didn't want to know where they were. I wasn't a radioman. If they needed a part and I was on a working party around a radio station, everybody picked up any piece of wire, any tube, anything electrical. You just brought them in and give them to the CO, and that was the last you seen of them, you know.

Marcello: And I guess at that stage, all the news you were getting was fairly bad, was it not?

Burge: Well, most of the news we was getting was Japanese-oriented. I think once a week they listened to some station on the West Coast, if they could pick it up under certain weather conditions. I didn't really know too much of what was going on in that respect, because it didn't make any difference: "Just keep your nose here, and in three or four months we're going to be out, anyway," you know. That was before it really got serious with me.

Marcello: I assume that for the most part here you more or less had time on your hands at Bicycle Camp. You didn't do a whole lot personally.

Burge: At Bicycle Camp, it was the most restful place that we'd been, yes.

Marcello: What sort of recreational activities were available here?

Burge: Well, I didn't go in for any of them, but I think we had a boxing smoker one time. They had a volleyball court out there and things like that. I don't recall if they put on any plays while we was there or not. Later on up in the jungle, they put on a little play if we had time on some special holiday or something, you know, to break the monotony.

Marcello: What contact did you have with the other nationalities here at Bicycle Camp?

Burge: Well, we stuck pretty much to ourselves. Now some of them socialized with the Aussies and so on; they were fine people. The Australians at that time, in my thoughts, was an American about thirty years before. They were a little behind, you know. They was good old boys, all of them.

I got acquainted with this Punjab, because he fascinated me. I didn't really know about them . . . a Gurkha was what he was, and they're night fighters. They're born and raised strictly for the English army back then for fighters. The English and Australians said that they were very dangerous. They'd go out on maneuvers, and the next morning they'd have a big chalk mark on their back or they had chalk marks on their gun butts and things like that. They'd swear that they had been wide awake and

scared to death all night, that nobody had been around them, but when it come daylight, they'd been marked. Those Gurkhas, if you asked to see their knife, they'd point and cut the heel of their hand and then hand it to you, because it's their belief or their religion that they never pull that knife that they don't draw blood. So they'll prick theirsself with it or slice theirsself enough to draw blood, and then they'll let you look at their knife.

Marcello: So you say that you did befriend one of these Gurkhas here at Bicycle Camp.

Burge: Well, I got acquainted with him, because the Aussies in their talk, when you asked them about them, they just intrigued me; I just wanted to know more about them, was all.

Marcello: Did you have free access from the compound of one nationality to the compound of another nationality?

Burge: Yes, it was just one fence around it. You could go visit back and forth to the Dutch. There wasn't too many English there; we really didn't get the English until we got to Singapore.

Marcello: But did they fence off each nationality, or did each nationality simply have separate barracks?

Burge: Separate barracks. As far as I can recall, they weren't . . .

Marcello: How was discipline being maintained in Bicycle Camp among the prisoners? In other words, were you still obeying your officers and so on and so forth?

Burge: Everybody was loyal to their officers, yes. The discipline itself came from the Japanese, because the officers were subject to the same thing we were. They were the buffer, and half the time, if one of your men did something wrong and you were the American officer in charge, you was the one that got beat on, see.

Marcello: Now were officers going on work details here?

Burge: To be in charge. There again, to be the go-between between the men and the Japanese.

Marcello: And there was no resentment because officers were not working?

Burge: Oh, no! No (chuckle), I'd have a lot rather been on the end of the shovel than I would have been him if I did something wrong. You had to have some sort of discipline. I don't think anyone resented the officers not working.

Marcello: Generally speaking, I gather the health of the prisoners here at Bicycle Camp was pretty good.

Burge: It was pretty good for what they'd been through. Like the group I was in, their feet was healing, and their wounds from the oil where it'd peeled off the skin, and

pulling the carts. These old boys were getting over the filth and stuff in Serang. Now you've undoubtedly talked to some of them that was in Serang. I guess that was one of the worst hell holes that ever was. We were fortunate to have missed that.

Marcello: What did you talk about when you sat around and made idle conversation or had bull sessions or so on?

Burge: Well, if you was with sailors, you talked about the battles we'd been through. If you was in the 131st, you talked about Texas (chuckle). Before I got out of there, I could go from Jacksboro to Decatur or anyplace. I knew every side road; I knew all about it, because they were--the majority of them--from within a hundred miles at the very farthest from each other. You knew everybody's girlfriend; and you knew all the back roads; and you know old John Farley's barn down there; and you knew where to turn and go down that road to get to somebody else's house and stuff like that, you know.

Marcello: What subject of conversation perhaps came up most often in these bull sessions?

Burge: Probably food.

Marcello: Did you sit around and dream up menus and so on?

Burge: We did later on. There wasn't too much of it in Java yet, but as we got on through there and got more integrated . . .

like, it was in Java that they took the officers and non-rated men and separated us, and then the rest of us got more integrated, you know. It took awhile to get acquainted. I mean, it does in big groups like that; the sailors stick to theirself, the soldiers stick to theirself, the Aussies stick to theirself. But as time wore on, everyday you met somebody else and got more integrated and so on, you know.

Marcello: Were the Houston sailors in a barracks to themselves?

Burge: As far as I can recall, we were, yes. We had our own, and across the compound, maybe sixty or seventy feet, there was another barracks. Soldiers were over there, and the Australians were someplace else out here. There was no animosity or anything among the groups, but we just . . . well, they knew all of each other, and we knew all of each other. We didn't really ignore each other.

Marcello: There's a certain amount of security in being around your own group or in familiar surroundings or what-have-you.

Burge: Around your own group, right, right.

Marcello: Is it safe to say that had you been able to spend the entire war at Bicycle Camp, being a POW might not have been that bad? In other words, being a prisoner-of-war

is bad under any circumstances, but Bicycle Camp really wasn't too bad as you look back upon it.

Burge: No, it sure wasn't. It was about the best there. Of course, when we got in Saigon, it turned out to be all right; but the trip through building the railroad and stuff had taken so much out of you. If you'd just stayed in the Bicycle Camp, it would have probably not have been too bad.

Marcello: Well, here at Bicycle Camp, you were close to civilization; food supplies and food sources were close by; they weren't working you; the shelter was pretty good; and the medical facilities weren't too bad here as compared to what they would become later on.

Burge: Right.

Marcello: So all in all, Bicycle Camp was not that bad a place, comparatively speaking.

Burge: It was just about the best stop we made.

Marcello: Okay, let's describe your leaving Bicycle Camp. Do you recall when you left?

Burge: Not the dates, I don't. I think we were there about six months.

Marcello: So was it about October of 1942 when you left there--sometime around there?

Burge: September or October. The strangest thing about this, I

don't remember when we went from one place to another. But my mother knew the year that I went from one country to the other. She's got that ESP or something. When I came home, and she said, "In such-and-such a year, where did you go? I know you went from one place to another. I knew you was still alive, because I felt it when you moved." It was still confused in my mind.

The only thing that I remember when we left Java is that they . . . don't ask me why they did it, but they did it each time you went from one country to another. They take like a glass stir rod for a mixed drink, like a swizzle stick, and they'd wipe it across your butt and put a smear on a piece of glass. Then they put it in an envelope with your name on it. What went from there and what they were trying to find out, what kind of a disease they determined from that or what, I don't know. But I know of no one that wasn't stopped from going on out the gate when you got ready to (chuckle).

Marcello: Did they prepare you for your exit from Bicycle Camp, or did they just suddenly tell you one day that you were going to leave?

Burge: They just divided us up . . . the officers above lieutenant junior grade and non-rated men and shipped them out; then they shipped the rest of us out. I didn't know where our

next destination was when we left there.

Marcello: Was it kind of unsettling to know that you would be leaving Bicycle Camp, or didn't it bother you any?

Burge: Well, I guess it's the fear of the unknown, you know. You know what you've got there; you don't know what you're going into when you leave it. So if you're surviving all right here, why take a chance? Yes, it was unsettling to leave it.

Marcello: Okay, so describe your departure.

Burge: Well, they just took us down there and put us on the ships and away we went.

Marcello: What belongings were you taking with you?

Burge: Oh, what I'd gathered up by that time . . . a G-string and a tin can; I was still using my coconut spoon, if I recall. I'd hung onto that coconut bowl. It didn't take long to pack (chuckle).

Marcello: But you were down to a G-string by this time already.

Burge: Yes, the shorts weren't fit to wear anymore.

Marcello: Okay, describe this ship that you were to use during this journey.

Burge: Well, the first one, I don't remember too much about it. It wasn't too bad compared to the next one. Of course, they were afraid of American submarines; there were always American submarines out there. It wasn't too far a trip

from Batavia to Singapore.

Marcello: Now when you got to Singapore, you were actually going to Changi Prison Camp, is that correct, as opposed to Changi Jail?

Burge: It was a British barracks. I don't know what they called it. They had left the British right there where they were with their military setup and everything else. All they took was their guns; they took the motors out of their vehicles, the ones that they didn't take the whole thing. Like, we had a truck there--a tank truck--that we went out and gathered peanut oil and coconut oil; and we had a flatbed that we used to gather wood. You'd get about twenty guys around it and push it up and down the hills.

Marcello: Now describe your journey aboard this ship from Batavia to Singapore. What were your quarters like aboard that ship?

Burge: Well, they just put us down in the hold like cattle. They had two layers of you with wooden boards around the side, you know. We was just a mass of humanity, just like a bucket of worms (chuckle). Wherever you could find a place to sit, that's where you sat.

Marcello: In other words, you couldn't stand up.

Burge: You could stand up if you got out here in the hold. They let you go on deck for so many certain hours to use the

rest room and so on, which was built out over the side.

Marcello: What were conditions like down in that hold?

Burge: Filthy. You didn't have any way to wash up or anything like that, you know.

Marcello: Were people beginning to have dysentery by this time?

Burge: Probably a certain amount of them. There again, it was a bad place; it was a bad memory, and I don't remember much about it. I just got on there, and you had a certain routine of going after your food and going to the rest room. That was just about it; you just slept and wondered and looked out the hatch at the sunshine and prayed at night that you didn't get hit by torpedoes. Pretty soon we was in Singapore.

Marcello: How did you get fed while you were aboard that ship?

Burge: They'd bring buckets of rice to the top of the hatch, as I recall, and you'd file by and get your ration in your bowl.

Marcello: How often could you come out on deck?

Burge: Once a day you got so many minutes up there; I don't know what it was. They had machine guns trained on you, and you couldn't go . . . all you did was get up there and get a breath of air and get the stench blowed off you mostly. There's no place to take a bath or wash your hands or anything there.

Marcello: Now could you go to the restroom whenever you wanted, or were there certain specific times when you went to the rest room?

Burge: If you had dysentery or something, you'd tell the guard, and then he'd holler at the next guard and so on, and they'd let you go. But they was taking you in groups where you'd better be ready to go when it come your group's turn. That's why there was very few . . . like in school, you hold up your hand, "I've gotta go," well, that didn't do any good there, because there was a group up there lined up to go. So it was kind of hard to buck the line.

Marcello: I guess this is when you're really getting the first taste of what it's like to be a prisoner-of-war. Bicycle Camp was looking better all the time.

Burge: Oh, yes. Yes, we all wanted to be back in Bicycle Camp.

Marcello: Fortunately, this particular phase of your trip didn't take too long.

Burge: No, it was a short trip. Those people that went on to Japan and stuff and got up there where it was cold and went that whole way, I don't know how any of them ever made it. Because it was bad enough just about, I think, on our three-day run or something like that.

Marcello: That's interesting that you bring up the subject of the ones that went to Japan. When you talk to the ones that

went to Japan, they say, "I don't know how those other guys stood it down in the jungles." Talking to you now, you say that you don't understand how those guys were able to take it up there in that cold weather.

Burge: No, not only that; they lived under the same conditions for a month or so that we was under for two or three days, see. So when you stop and think how rough it was on you, how would you have liked to have had two or three months of it?

Marcello: Okay, so what happens when you get to Singapore.

Burge: Well, we went to these British barracks then.

Marcello: What were the British barracks like here at Changi?

Burge: Oh, they had bunks there. They had springs on them, you know, and so on; they weren't bad. And you had bathing facilities and stuff. It was set up on a hill where you looked down in the harbor. It wasn't bad. Now that's when we started going out on work details.

Marcello: Describe what these work details were like.

Burge: Well, we cut down just about every rubber tree that was on Singapore and grubbed the stumps and planted a garden. We thought, "Well, boy, we're going to eat here. The onions are starting to get green; the lettuce and the radishes are coming up. This is great!" Well, that's when they marched us out of there (chuckle).

Marcello: Did the Japanese give you the impression that this was to be your garden?

Burge: No, I don't think that they gave us any impression, but you didn't see that many Japs around, and you figured it was going to be your garden, you know.

Marcello: How hard was this work?

Burge: Well, it wasn't anything like we got into on the railroad; you just kept moving. You didn't have any allotted amount to do like we did later on and so on; you just kind of worked together. When you put 500 people out here cleaning off this field, it's not long until that many people, if they just walk back and forth over it, clean it out, you know. I don't recall in Singapore of being overworked.

Marcello: What was the food like here at Singapore?

Burge: Well, it wasn't what we expected. They told us we was going to Singapore when we was on the way. They said, "Boy, they have got the mutton. They have got lockers full of mutton up there. We're really going to be eating."

Marcello: Now who was telling you about these lockers of mutton? Or was this just some of the scuttlebutt going around?

Burge: This was just the scuttlebutt, you know. But it was true; they did have mutton, and it had been in those freezers since World War I. I don't know what you think of curry. I'd never eaten it to amount to anything before; where I

did it was used sparsely as a flavor. Well, this came out real yellow, and it still couldn't camouflage that stinking mutton.

Marcello: As hungry as you were, it still was not very appetizing, I gather.

Burge: It was far from appetizing. The fact of the case is, I don't recall if I finished all of mine or not. Then we went back to the regular old rice and Japanese food routine there.

We got in that first night and . . . I don't know. An American officer and this English major got to talking. The English major was telling him, "Oh, come on over and have a drink." They were living, aside from not having arms, like they lived before the war. "You come on over to my quarters," and he showed him this chicken house out there. He had about twenty-five or thirty chickens. He was bragging, "I've got my own chickens and my own eggs. Man, everything is just like it was. This is all right."

Well, the next morning bright and early, the old major is back up there looking for this lieutenant, and he's very unhappy. He's accusing the Yanks of stealing his chickens. (Chuckle) He hasn't got a chicken one the next morning when he got up. But he's never found a feather yet.

Marcello: Did you steal those chickens?

Burge: Well, I ate pretty good that night. I wouldn't say I helped steal his chickens (chuckle).

Marcello: I understand this is where you got your first real close contact with the British, and it wasn't always a very good experience.

Burge: Oh, they . . . now today, if you asked me who I had the most animosity against--the Japanese or the British--it might sound warped to you, but I would say the British.

Marcello: Why was that?

Burge: Well, just all the way through. Now there were 60,000 English on Singapore; there were . . . I don't know the figures, but 10,000 or 12,000 Australians; and, I believe, 6,000 Scotsmen. When they capitulated at Singapore, there were 60,000 uninjured British; there were 200 or 300 Australians; and there were eight Scotsmen. Now does that start to tell you anything right there? Aside from the way they lived and their immorality and their filth as time went on, it just builds up on you.

Marcello: Do you get the first tastes of this here at Changi?

Burge: No, not too much there. We just kind of ignored them. After we found out their mutton wasn't any good (chuckle) and their chickens was gone, we didn't have much to do with them.

Marcello: Do you remember any of the incidents involving the so-called "King's Coconuts," when the Americans were eating the coconuts and the British evidently were trying to prevent it?

Burge: (Chuckle) Oh, yes. "Say there, mate, those are the king's coconuts! You cannot do that!"

Marcello: What was the American reaction?

Burge: We kind of laughed at them. There was an old truck down there someplace, and one of our guys was draining some oil out in a sardine can to make a lamp, you know, to have something to burn at night. This major came along and kicked him on the foot and says, "I say, mate, what are you doing?" You know, he come out of there in no uncertain terms--a big old boy from Iowa--and told him it was none of his business. So they proceeded to call the corporal of the guard and lock him up. "Bull" Roth was his name; he died up in prison camp there in the jungle. He slept between me and Elmo Kennedy and woke up one morning dead. They took him down there and put him in this prison and made us bring his little bag of belongings down there.

The first thing they did was have an inspection the next morning. One of them whipper-snapper sergeants that the limeys had walked over there and kicked his gear around. He said, "Now straighten it up again." So "Bull" proceeded

to bop him real good and healthy.

They wanted to know his history from the officer, and the officer said, "Well, he was champion of the Asiatic Fleet." They weren't long in getting him out of there; they didn't want anybody like that in there disrupting their jail, you know.

Marcello: It is true that the British more or less ran that camp.

Burge: They ran their end of it. They didn't run any Americans or Australians. The fact of the case is, as we got on up in the jungle, those eight Scotsmen could handle the whole British army. There wasn't enough of them to get in one group but they could whip the whole bunch of them, because they didn't only dislike them, they hated them. The Australians said that they wanted to travel in our group; they didn't want anything to do with the British.

Marcello: Now did the Japanese guards more or less stay away from you here at Changi?

Burge: At Changi, they did, yes. We had very little contact with them.

Marcello: This was a huge camp, was it not?

Burge: Oh, yes, it was a huge camp. It was very seldom that you'd see a fence. They had certain high chain-link fences here and there, and they'd have those big Sikh guards that seemed seven foot tall with their turban on and so on, you know,

standing guard on them--without a gun or anything. But they had their exercises and their drills and everything just like there was no war going on there on Changi.

Marcello: Okay, you actually didn't stay at Changi too long, did you?

Burge: No. Three or four months, I'd say, or something like that. It wasn't too long.

Marcello: Were you kind of glad to get out of there?

Burge: Oh, no, we was doing all right. There again, we stayed by ourselves, had very little contact with the British, and the Japs weren't bothering us. We had this high-and-dry barracks on the hill, and we was getting enough to survive to eat fine.

Then they moved us out there one morning . . . they marched us . . . we started out marching, and we marched across the bridge from Singapore to Johore and up through there a ways; I don't know just how far we did march. Then we got on trains, and they took us on up past Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, to an island off there somewhere, and they loaded us on these ships.

Marcello: They took you up to George Town or Penang, wasn't it?

Burge: Penang. Penang's what it was, yes.

Marcello: Now was this a rather uneventful train trip up to Penang?

Burge: Oh, no, it was quite exciting.

Marcello: Why was that?

Burge: Well, they put us in these boxcars. They're a miniature compared to ours, maybe half as big as one of our boxcars, made out of metal. They'd herd you in there like cattle and put a guard in with you.

As we progressed up through there, that's when we first started seeing American fighter planes. They came over and strafed the trains. You're just out of one tunnel and into another one; I guess half the trip up through there was in tunnels. So the engineer, he'd pull the train in there and hide from the planes.

While we was in there, why, a few of these guards every once in awhile would fall out unconscious and be across the rails when the train started up again then. We got to Kuala Lumpur, and this Japanese general met the train and wanted to know where his troops was. We told them they were a bunch of cowards; that everytime a plane would come over, they'd jump and run, you know.

Marcello: Did he buy this story?

Burge: Hell, his guards weren't there; we were. What else could he do? There wasn't no chance for us to escape, anyway; I mean, there was no place for us to go.

Marcello: But weren't you worried about some sort of retaliation if they had found out what you had done to those guards?

Burge: Well, what could they do? Maybe kill ten of us for each

body or something, and how do you know you're going to be one of them that gets killed? It was just a chance you take.

Marcello: What were conditions like inside those boxcars?

Burge: Well, aside from getting a breath of fresh air once in awhile and getting out in the open, it was so hot that the guards had to leave the door open for them to survive theirself, you know. They're pretty much of a mess. It wasn't long enough for you to have to worry about sleeping. Some of the guys passed out, and we made room for them and stuff and tried to get them over to the door where they can get air. But we were just packed in there like sardines in a can, and a hot can at that. That's about (chuckle) the extent of it. When you'd get in these tunnels with this coal-burning locomotive up ahead of you, it'd get pretty hard to breathe sometimes with all that smoke in there, but we come out the other end of each one of them.

Marcello: Okay, so what happens now when you get to Penang?

Burge: Then they put us on ships again. There was three ships, I believe.

Marcello: Now do they tell you where you're going or what you're going to do at this point?

Burge: No, I don't recall being told that I was going to Moulmein, Burma.

Marcello: But this is where you were ultimately going.

Burge: Yes.

Marcello: Now describe what this ship was like that you boarded here at Penang.

Burge: This ship, the history I got of it, was the Dai Nichi Maru. England sold it to Japan for junk in 1921. We rode it in the last of '42 or the first of '43. It was all Americans, I think, on this one. There was a thousand Dutch on another one. We had enough locomotives and rails and stuff between the three of them to start building the railroad. They had put all the Japanese army engineers-- brains and so on--that were going to start it . . . they were on the ships with us.

There was no lights allowed at night. They was afraid of submarines all the time, even more scared up there than they had been when we went to Singapore.

So one day here come these Liberators that come over and started bombing us. Those ships were so old that the shrapnel would fly right through the sides.

The one that the Dutch were on . . . the reason I mention it was that there was a thousand Dutchmen. A bomb went right down the stack and blew up. There was 500 Jap soldiers in the forward hold loaded with a cargo of rice. The bomb went through that hatch and got all 500 soldiers.

When they got through picking up survivors, they hadn't lost one solitary Dutchman off that other ship that got sunk.

They straddled us, and we had all these "big-wig" Japanese officers. They run and jumped in a whaleboat and swung out on a painter away from the ship to cast off. They came over and straddled us, and the bomb went right down alongside of all these "big-wig" Japs. You could lay there in that hold and look up in the air and just see all kinds of power going up through there, you know, these generals and colonels and all that stuff that were supposed to be the brains for starting this railroad, see.

Marcello: That must have been a rather terrifying experience.

Burge: Well, it was terrifying, but, there again (chuckle), there's no place to run and no place to dig a hole. What are you going to do?

Marcello: How long did this attack last?

Burge: Oh, they just made two or three passes. After they had sunk that other ship and straddled us . . . they had a 3-inch .38-caliber or something back on the stern of this merchant ship. The Japs got excited and tried to fire, and they didn't lock the breech, and it blew up. I believe it killed one Australian. There was some Aussies back there

and the gun crew. It started a fire. So these pilots said, "Well, we got them both," so they went on. They put the fire out and picked up survivors that day, and the next day we got into Moulmein.

Marcello: Now I would assume that you were down in the hold while all this was taking place.

Burge: Oh, yes. Yes, they wouldn't let you out of that hold.

Marcello: And about all you could see was when that bomb hit that Japanese whaleboat or whatever it was.

Burge: Yes. You could just see what was flying in the air--the debris, you know, and the bodies and stuff.

Marcello: Describe what conditions were like aboard this ship.

Burge: Well, there again, there was a . . . I guess, like any slave ship, you was just jammed in there together, and, thank God, it was only a two or three-day trip. It was even filthier and a worse trip than the one from Batavia to Singapore.

Marcello: Were you allowed to come out on deck at all while you were on the Dai Nichi Maru?

Burge: Well, it was just about like the one going to Singapore. You was allowed to come out at a certain time, and you had to stay below at night; that was a "no-no" going up there at night. They were afraid you might light a cigarette or make a signal to a submarine or something, you know.

They were really running scared up there with those submarines.

Marcello: Now how did you get fed aboard the Dai Nichi Maru? Did you come out on deck, or was the rice lowered down into the hold?

Burge: It seems like it was lowered down on that one, if I'm not mistaken.

Marcello: And then was it distributed down there in the hold?

Burge: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, so you land at Moulmein, Burma. What happens at this point?

Burge: Well, that's where we met the atap huts. The Korean guards came in, I believe; they were waiting on us and took us over from the Japanese soldiers.

Marcello: Okay, so this is where you have your first encounter with the Korean guards. Now you mentioned the atap huts. Did you stay a couple of days in the local jail here in Moulmein before you went up into the jungle? Do you recall that?

Burge: Yes, we had a stopping-over place there somewhere. I guess it would have been the Moulmein jail, because that's about the only place that was there.

Marcello: Do you recall anything about that jail?

Burge: Not a thing. I sure don't.

Marcello: Okay, and then from there you go up into the jungle.

Burge: Then we went to the jungle.

Marcello: Okay, where did you go from the Moulmein jail? Did you go to Thanbyuzayat?

Burge: Well, we went by kilos. I think we went out to the 10 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: In other words, you didn't even pass through Thanbyuzayat?

Burge: Not that I recall. We just started out through there clearing land for the railroad.

Marcello: Okay, what happens when you get to the 10 Kilo Camp?

Burge: Well, they had built these huts ahead of time for us to move in, and we started going on work details. There was some of them . . . the English was ahead of us on a lot of it until we got way on up in the jungle . . . oh, I guess, 50 and 70 Kilos was when we started taking the lead in cleaning off the land and building the bridges and making cuts and fills and so on like that.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up here a minute. Now you get to the 10 Kilo Camp after leaving Moulmein. By this time, do you know that you're working on a railroad?

Burge: Oh, yes, yes.

Marcello: Do the Japanese put you through any sort of an orientation or anything of that nature? In other words, did they tell you what you were doing and why you were doing it and what

was to be expected of you and things of that nature?

Burge: They told us we'd dig so many cubic feet of dirt a day. They didn't give us much information, no. You would just do as they said; if they said, "Dig a hole three feet square and three feet deep," that's what you did.

Marcello: Now were the atap huts already built when you got to 10 Kilo Camp?

Burge: They were. They were built most of the way we went.

Marcello: Had native labor probably done this?

Burge: Native labor. The Burmese and the Indians and so on built most of it.

Marcello: Describe what one of these atap huts was like.

Burge: Well, I'd say they were a hundred feet long with a walkway down the middle and two decks high. The first deck would be about . . . well, the bed height was a foot-and-a-half or two foot off the deck, and then they'd built another one maybe three feet above that one--they'd build another deck--and leave the outside open around up there. The bottom one would be closed in. We were getting out in the jungle then where there was a lot of snakes and animals and, you know, leopards and lions and panthers or whatever they were . . . I don't know. They'd keep a fire going at the end of each barracks at night so nothing would come in. There were some pretty good-sized cat tracks out there sometimes

in that mud. See, we're getting up where it rains six months. You was mud to your knees; and then you had six months of dust to your knees.

Marcello: About how large was one of these camps in terms of the number of people that would be quartered there?

Burge: Oh, anyplace from 500 to maybe 1,500 or 2,000.

Marcello: So they were fairly good-sized camps.

Burge: Yes.

Marcello: And again, they were made up of all nationalities.

Burge: All nationalities.

Marcello: Now describe the work that you were doing here at the 10 Kilo Camp. You mentioned that this is the first camp that you went to.

Burge: It was pretty flat land there. We didn't stay in 10 Kilo very long. It was just kind of a warm-up for when we got on up in the jungle. We didn't handle any rails or anything in 10 Kilo.

Marcello: Where did you go from 10 Kilo Camp?

Burge: I believe to 30 Kilo. About every ten miles, you had a camp. Some of them we hit, and some of them we missed. My big stay wasn't until we got to 100 Kilo Camp.

Marcello: Well, now when you got to 30 Kilo Camp, is that where you began making cuts and fills and all that sort of thing? When you were at 10 Kilo Camp, that was probably relatively

level ground, was it not?

Burge: Right, yes. It was just kind of desert country in there. At 30 Kilo, we started . . . you'd march about five miles in each direction, you know. You'd go back down the road and bring it up past the camp and then about five more miles. Then they'd have somebody else on up there, and then you'd go on to another one. We spent the majority of our time at 100 Kilo . . . 100 and 110 Kilo. We got all that rough country through there.

Marcello: Now when was it that they assigned each one of the prisoners so many cubic meters of dirt to move? When did that begin?

Burge: Well, the first time I really recall it was when we was at 100 Kilo Camp. Probably back down the line, it started. But up there it was such rough country that, man, you dug days and days--I mean, hundreds of you--to make a cut. All the dirt that you cut , you took out either side of it to make a fill on the other end, you know--"yo-yo baskets." They were a gunny sack tied on a pole with two guys. We stayed there and built all those cuts and bridges and fills, and then they sent a bunch of us back down to 70 Kilo and put us to gandy-dancing. That's loading the ties and the rails and stuff to build the road where we'd made the bed, you know.

Marcello: Okay, let's back up here a minute, because we're not keeping

this in any sort of a sequence now. You first go to the 10 Kilo Camp, and you don't stay there very long.

Burge: Right.

Marcello: Okay, then from the 10 Kilo Camp, as best you recall, you proceeded up to the 30 Kilo Camp.

Burge: The 30 Kilo and the 50 Kilo and the 70 Kilo and the 100 Kilo, I believe, was the sequence that we went. Like I say, I don't really recall it because it didn't get rough enough to get my attention until we got to that 100 Kilo. Then I knew I was someplace.

Marcello: Basically, all of these camps are constructed in the same way.

Burge: That's right. They're all out of atap; they're all . . . well, it's just all bamboo up there. By the time they get enough land cleared to build it, they've got enough material to build it.

Marcello: Okay, now let's talk about some of the work that was done at these camps. In general, we're talking about cuts and fills for the most part.

Burge: Right . . . and driving piling.

Marcello: And driving piling. How would you go about making these cuts and fills? Now when I say, "How would you go about making them," I'm referring to the type of implements that you were using and what would be required of you and so on

and so forth.

Burge: We had picks and shovels and "yo-yo baskets" or woven baskets to carry the dirt in and a bamboo pole across your shoulder with the basket or the gunny sack or whatever the sling was. They'd just fill it up with dirt, and you'd take it out there and dump it and come back and get another load and take it out and dump it.

Marcello: In other words, one man would be filling these sacks with the dirt, and another man would be hauling it away, so to speak.

Burge: Yes, well, it'd take two men to haul it away and probably two or three digging. You had to go together on getting these meters of dirt out. You didn't just go out and dig you a hole so big square. Ten men would have a hole ten times what you was supposed to move by yourself. You all worked together getting that hole so deep and wide and cleaned out that day; that's when you went back to camp.

Marcello: In other words, at the beginning of the workday, the Japanese engineer or whomever would measure off the specified amount of dirt that had to be moved,

Burge: By a certain number of men, yes.

Marcello: That's correct. Like you mentioned, when this specified amount of dirt was removed, then the workday was over.

Burge: You was ready to start back to camp.

Marcello: Now is it not true that over a period of time this requirement was gradually increased?

Burge: Oh, yes.

Marcello: You might describe why and how this took place.

Burge: Well, I don't know why. We found out . . . in the first place, we was stupid. We got the allotted amounts out so we could get through a little earlier; there's still daylight left, you know. The Japs reasoned, "Well, if they can do that much, they can do more." Finally, we got smart enough to where you paced yourself; you kept looking busy and just couldn't get anymore out and it started getting dark before you was through. Well, then they'd slack off a little bit, see. I'd tell them there was a lot more rock in here or that it was a lot harder than that was back there or less people carrying or . . . make up excuses, you know. But we finally got smart.

Marcello: You were all still in pretty good shape at this time yet, too, were you not?

Burge: We were until we got . . . well, we was going down. Our food was getting worse. This is when we started getting the sweepings off the floor and so on, and it wasn't getting through to us all the time real good. They was getting horse meat in rough boxes, you know, wooden boxes.

When they'd pull it up there--there again was your steel boxcars in the tropics with no refrigeration--you can figure out what (chuckle) shape the meat would be in. The green would be running down on the ground down the doors. The doctors inspected it and tried it out a little bit and found out if they washed it and boiled it good, nobody got sick from it. So we took whatever they sent.

Marcello: Now we mentioned awhile ago that this is where you encounter the Korean guards. Describe what they were like.

Burge: Well, first the Koreans had been under the Japanese for 400 or 500 years. They had been brow-beat by them; they had no arms; they had no rights; they were animals as far as the Japanese was concerned. Well, the Japanese had to utilize them somehow. They couldn't get them to fight in the front lines, and they couldn't let them be behind them because they'd shoot them; so they let them be warehouse guards and just all kind of flunkies out of them, you know.

Marcello: What were some of the things that these Korean guards would do to the prisoners?

Burge: Well, they weren't interested in getting the railroad built. The Japs didn't even want them around on the work detail or anything; they didn't like them, either. They was . . .

well, they wanted to let you know they was in charge, and they got pretty mean.

Marcello: What were some of the things they would do?

Burge: Well, they'd stand you at attention with a rock over your head out in the sun. It was according to what you did, you know. Sometimes they was satisfied with beating you with a rifle butt or a pole or trying to knock you down by slapping you. They couldn't kill a mosquito on the side of your face, but they thought they could . . . oh, there was one or two of them that was pretty good, but the rest of them, they just hadn't been violent, I guess, you know, raised boxing or fighting or anything. They didn't know beans about it. I think we run into one Korean guard that was a boxer, and he couldn't hit you hard enough to knock you down with his bare hand.

Marcello: Did you have nicknames for most of these guards?

Burge: Oh, yes, like "Liver Lips" and so on like that (chuckle), you know, whatever they looked like.

Marcello: Did you personally ever get beaten by any of these Korean guards?

Burge: Oh, sure. I don't guess there was anybody that didn't get beaten eventually for some reason. Like, if they was out for revenge . . . if their officers had been on them or something, naturally, like I said, they was going to have

revenge before sundown. If you was the one that crossed their path, you was the one that got it, you know.

Marcello: What form did the punishment take, that is, the punishment that you received? Was it mainly hitting, beating, things of that sort?

Burge: Well, sometimes it'd be a rifle butt to the kidneys or on the arch of your foot or a swing at your head or something. Of course, you've always got an arm up to ward it off, but it hurts about as bad on the arm as it does on the head sometimes, you know. Sometimes it was just old bamboo poles--whatever was handy.

Marcello: Now where did you say you spent the bulk of your time while you were working on the railroad?

Burge: 100 and 105 Kilo most of the time.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about the 100 and the 105 Kilo Camps. Those two are rather infamous, as I recall, because it seems like that's where most of the suffering and the deaths and so on and so forth occurred.

Burge: I got down to 113 pounds, and I was one of the fattest guys in the camp.

Marcello: Now by the time that you reached the 100 Kilo Camp and the 105 Kilo Camp, the rainy season had started at the same time that the Japanese initiated the so-called "Speedo" campaign. Is that correct?

Burge: Yes. Yes, they weren't doing the work fast enough. Well, the English had surveyed this railroad that we built, and they said it would take ten years with the best equipment and the best engineers to put a train on it. In fourteen months with a pick and shovel, we had trains running on it. So that was the kind of "Speedo" program they had in effect.

Marcello: Describe how things changed once the "Speedo" campaign was initiated.

Burge: Well, more people started getting sick, you know, sicker and weaker, and pretty soon they couldn't go out. If you couldn't go on a work detail like that, your rations were cut in half. So you're already sick and you're already down, and then you're not getting anything to eat; they made a pretty good-sized cemetery up in there.

Marcello: What sort of work were you doing here at the 100 and 105 Kilo Camps?

Burge: Making cuts and fills and driving bridge piling.

Marcello: Describe the driving of the piling. That's a rather interesting procedure, I think.

Burge: They put this A-frame up in the air or whatever you want to call it with a pulley on it and this big weight. Then you would get a bunch of POW's back here on a rope, and they holler, "Ichi, ni, san, shi!" You're pulling

all this time; when they holler, "Shi," you let it go and drop it. Then you pull it back up in the air and drop it again and move it over and drive another piling. It was all manpower; there wasn't nothing mechanical about it.

Marcello: Evidently there was very few pieces of machinery at all used on that railroad.

Burge: I seen one bulldozer, and I don't have any idea where it came from. But to show you the Japanese discipline, there was a bunch of soldiers who come down through there marching one day. Now this . . . we had the railroad built, and we was busting ballast up on this hillside and "yo-yoing" it barefoot over this pure rock, you know. But by that time, we was like an old horse's hoof. If it hadn't been for the rats eating the calluses off at night, they'd have been an inch thick, I guess. But like I say, this column come through going to someplace. This Jap that was operating the bulldozer called one of them old boys over out of rank. He was a sergeant, and he called this lower-rated person over and showed him how to start the bulldozer. Then he got him up there to operate it, and he killed the motor. He'd probably never seen a bulldozer in his life before. That sergeant beat him until he left him laying there unconscious, and he

went and took his place in the ranks marching with this other column. When that Jap come to and got so he could, he crawled up there and started that bulldozer and started using it. Everything he'd been told once (chuckle) come back to him after he'd come to.

Marcello: Now how did your work pick up during the "Speedo" campaign?

Burge: Well, they just kept giving us more and more to do and working us longer hours. No matter how much they gave you to do, you did more, and then you was getting farther away from camp. Like, you walked five miles through the mud one way and worked all day in it and then walked back at night. You was so exhausted you didn't even wash the mud off your feet; you just laid down.

Marcello: How did you eat when you were working during the "Speedo" campaign? How did you take your meals?

Burge: They'd bring our noon meal out to us. We'd have a little bit of rice in the morning, and then they'd carry it out in wooden tubs--a barrel sawed in half. They had a detail; they'd carry it out there at noon and give us another ration. Then if you wasn't too tired at night and there was anything cooked, you got some when you got back in.

Marcello: What was it like working in the rainy season?

Burge: Pretty miserable.

Marcello: Describe what it was like.

Burge: Well, you got that . . . it'd get to where you passed mud balls. You couldn't get anything in a basket or gunny sack or anything, you know, these "yo-yo's"; you'd just make a big old mud ball and pass it on to the next guy and he'd pass it. You didn't slow down because it got muddy or rainy or anything like that.

Marcello: How did the rainy season affect living in the atap huts?

Burge: Surprisingly, they was pretty waterproof. When the rainy season first comes, all those leaves of that atap is rolled up dry. The first day or two, there's a lot of leaks; but the longer it soaks it up, the tighter it gets.

I got trench foot there. I woke up one morning, and my feet were just . . . well, my legs from my knees down were just clubs, like elephantiasis. You've seen pictures of that elephantiasis? You couldn't put your finger on the skin anyplace without touching a . . . just like a little scar with water running out of it, moisture. I thought, "Man, this is it!" You know, you get a break in the skin up there, and it was an ulcer, and a week later it was gangrene and the end.

I'm standing there trying to walk out to the latrine-- it was in the morning--and an old Aussie comes by. He said, "Boy! Mate, you've got a bloody beautiful case of

trench foot there! You got any shoes?" I said, "No, I don't have any shoes." Well, he said, "You bum, beg, or steal any old rags or anything you got and wrap them around your feet." He said, "Everybody going to that latrine, you have them urinate on it." I said, "What?" He said, "It's terrible . . ." he was an old-timer; he was in the trenches of World War I, and he said it was absolutely a sin to urinate on the ground in those trenches in France. He said if you didn't have trench foot, you used your buddy's boots.

Well, they had told us quite a few things that seemed farfetched that they had learned through hard knocks. I did what he told me, and, man, it was a stinking mess! The next morning . . . well, I had to stay in camp; that's about the one day of work . . . maybe I missed a couple of others with malaria. Anyway, the next morning, I took them rags off, and there wasn't a mark; the swelling was gone; all them little cuts had healed up. It's that tannic acid in the urine that cured that trench foot. So them old Aussies, I looked up to them quite a bit from their homespun learning, you know.

Marcello: How sick did you have to be in order to stay off one of the work details?

Burge: You just about had to not be able to stand on your feet.

Marcello: Who determined whether or not you were sick enough to stay off of work detail?

Burge: Well, our doctors were where you went. Then the Japs'd come through and look you over and try to have you stand up and stuff. Like I say, you got your rations cut so drastically that anybody that could get up and walk was going to go up and walk, anyway. But when you get about fourteen or sixteen hours a day on that "Speedo" campaign and walk back and forth through that mud, it wears anybody down.

Marcello: In our conversation off the tape, you said that you tried to stay as far away from the hospital hut as possible. Now why was that?

Burge: Well, as a rule, when they took someone to the hospital, they didn't walk back. I mean, I don't suppose anybody was what you'd call a "gold-bricker" in modern terms. As long as I could go, I went. The fact of the case is, I was very fortunate; I never was in the hospital . . . only in Batavia with that yellow jaundice. If I got malaria, they just wrapped you in rice sacks and lay you out in the sun alongside the hut, and you'd shiver until you'd finally break into a sweat, you know. That was about an every two-week occurrence.

Marcello: So you did have malaria along with everybody else in the camp.

Burge: Oh, yes, I had malaria along with everybody else in the camp. I went to the bathroom as high as sixty-four times in one day.

Marcello: In other words, you had dysentery pretty badly.

Burge: Well, no. This wasn't dysentery at this time. I just had the "trots." We was coming in from work, and this spring came down out of the Himalayan Mountains there. Boy! It was cold water, and I just laid down there and filled up on it. I didn't go twenty feet until I dropped my G-string, and when I passed out water, it was still cold; that's how cleaned out I was.

When we first started out, I guess it was, after we come out of Moulmein up there, I went twenty-one days without going to the bathroom. I went to the doctor then. I made a sick call, you know, and I told him it'd been twenty-one days. He said, "Don't worry about it." I said, "Well, I am worried about it." He said, "When you get enough food in you to make a turd, you'll go." Sure enough, in a day or two I went. I don't know . . . it was twenty-eight, twenty-nine days altogether. I didn't have any ill effects from it from going that long.

Marcello: Did you ever have any tropical ulcers?

Burge: Not in the big sense of a tropical ulcer, no. I had a boil come up on my leg . . . well, that was after we got

to Saigon. But they had more treatment there; they had a little aspirin and stuff. There again, an old Aussie said, "If'll you take a little sliver of saltwater soap and put granulated sugar on it and put it over there and wrap it up, that'll bring it to a head." I did, and the next morning that bandage was stuck. When I pulled it loose, you could put the end of your little finger down in that hole. It looked about like a .45-caliber bullet. That whole thing came out just as clean as could be. I washed it out with as hot a water as I could stand, and that was the end of it. It started healing from bottom up.

I had a few small ones on my ankles, but even the scars are about gone from them. I had them real bad, and it was getting dangerous. Then we made a move in the rainy season, and we walked all day and half the night and got to this new camp. I think we went from 100 to 105 Kilo or something like that; it was one of those moves. Maybe we walked back from 70 up to 100 Kilo. But, boy, I just dropped when I got there, and I was in mud clear to my knees. I went back out and worked the next day. The next night when I had enough energy to wash up, all them ulcers had healed from being packed in that mud. That was the worst I got. I don't know . . .the Lord

just come along and fixed me up everytime I'd get something started.

Marcello: I understand those tropical ulcers could really be nasty things.

Burge: Oh, my goodness! So many of them people died of it, and our doctors did such a good job with nothing.

Marcello: What remedies did they have for tropical ulcers?

Burge: Well, one of the best remedies that I seen them use would seem horrible to you. But they'd have you uncover it and let the flies blow it, and the maggots ate all the dead flesh out. Then they'd take hot water and wash the maggots off. That was the only way they could remove all the dead flesh and stuff. Then they'd try to keep them covered up and moist with hot water every day or every hour or something--I don't know just how they did it in the hospital--until it'd get healed up.

I've seen some terrible ones where the shin bones . . . was actually eaten past the shin bone and stuff. Them old boys'd keep on plugging; of course, they weren't going out on work details when they got that bad.

Marcello: I gather that sometimes the only thing that could be done would be to take a spoon and dig out that dead flesh.

Burge: This has been done. I've helped hold people down while they did it.

Marcello: I'm sure the pain was excruciating.

Burge: Oh, I guess it was so bad you couldn't pass out. You take a place six inches in diameter and a quarter inch deep in your skin and then somebody scraping on that meat with a spoon. The old doctor'd hone one side of it up to make it as much like a knife as he could and just between hacking and cutting and scraping would take it out of there.

Marcello: Did you ever see men just literally give up and die?

Burge: Yes. One old boy from Texas here in that 131st Field Artillery had everything in the world going for him. He was very religious . . . came from a very religious family. I don't recall his name right now, but he was real likeable. His family was well-to-do; he had everything back here to live for. He said, "I can't eat that rice."

I did everything under the sun. I took him out and showed him the "boot hill" across the hollow over there; I said, "That's where you're going if you don't start eating rice! You'd better get your ration!" "I can't eat it." I said, "Well, you're going over there!" I'd say, "What size shoes do you wear? How about your dinner bucket?" Or your "billy," we called them, you know, after the Aussies-- the old bucket. "I'm going to take all that stuff here in just a day or two if you don't eat!" Of course, I wasn't going to do it, but that boy just flat starved

himself to death. He said, "I can't eat rice." Of course, the Englishmen, they gave up like flies. They could catch a cold and lay down and die.

Marcello: How could you tell when a man had literally given up the fight, so to speak?

Burge: Well, that's the only one that I know of that just absolutely refused to eat until he was dead. He just rebelled against that rice.

Marcello: Did you ever attend any of the burial details?

Burge: No, I never did. The less fortunate that could still walk around camp and stuff generally was put out on these burial details. But the graveyards, as we went through the jungle, wouldn't be too far from the camp, you know; maybe it was just a little gulley between us and them or something like that.

Marcello: I understand that all these graveyards and so on were carefully noted and so on and so forth.

Burge: I think that they have a record of about everybody that died and when they died and what they died of. How these fellows could keep those secrets and keep the documents on them and keep them hidden from the Japs as often as they was searched, I don't know how they did it.

Marcello: All this had to be done on the sly, so to speak.

Burge: On the sly. There was absolutely no records to be allowed

kept as far as I know. Some of them stored them in their brain until they got somewhere else where they could write them down, and some of them actually had them on paper when they came out of that place.

Marcello: Now by the time you get to the 100 Kilo Camp, you're also on short rations, are you not?

Burge: Yes. The closest place was at 70 Kilo Camp, which was as far as the railroad was laid, and the road was just almost non-existent. The bamboo was cleaned out so you could get through, but it'd be days sometimes that you didn't get anything at all in the way of supplies there. What you had, you had to ration, and that wasn't too much.

Marcello: I assume, however, that the Japanese were eating better than you were.

Burge: At that time, they were eating a heck of a lot better than us. The Koreans, they weren't getting too much, because they was in the same camp with us. But they made sure it was two bags of rice there. Ten of them had one bag, while the thousand (chuckle) of us had the other bag, you know. After all, they had the gun.

Marcello: Now was it also around this time that Dr. Lumpkin died? Do you recall that?

Burge: I don't know where Dr. Lumpkin died. It undoubtedly was,

because . . .

Marcello: I was going to ask you what sort of an effect this had upon the morale.

Burge: Well, naturally, it makes you wonder, "Well, if the doctor can't live through it, how are the rest of us going to make it?", you know. Like I say, I wasn't too well-acquainted with the hospital, because it was very seldom I went there. I believe it was 100 Kilo where he died. The majority of the deaths we had in the working bunch . . . some of them were so bad that they'd take them way back down--I don't know--to 10 or 20 Kilo or someplace down in there. It was very seldom one of them ever come back up the track. That was the end of them when they went down there.

Marcello: They had a so-called hospital camp established--I believe it was at the 80 Kilo Camp--and everybody that went back there, like you say, usually never came out of it.

Burge: Right. That's when we got on up into 100 and 105 Kilo. When you went to 80 Kilo, you was on your way out.

Marcello: By this time, what sort of an attitude do you have toward the Japanese?

Burge: The Japanese, we didn't have too much contact with.

Marcello: Or the Koreans.

Burge: The Koreans? Man, anytime you could get one, get him! We had no fences up there; there was no place to go; it was

a thousand miles from the coast; the natives you couldn't trust; there was panthers and stuff out in the woods and jungle. You didn't know where to go. But they'd always cut out a perimeter around the outside of camp for walking, see.

Well, that was quite a little game--it's nothing to be proud of now--but at that time, you wanted to do what you could to stop them, get even with them, and so on. I didn't get as much beating as a lot of them, because I just stayed out of their road, did what they told me, and so on. But every once in awhile, you could get caught in a trap, you know. But you'd get out there at night and lay for them and cold-cock them. They always marched with their bayonets fixed, you know. Well, you'd cold-cock them good and run the bayonet down through their old belly. Most of them would get awake and scream before they'd die. By that time, you're back in there in your bunk. They'd fall everybody out and count them off and everybody's accounted for. Well, this guys dies, and then along before morning, you may hear one or two gunshots. The rest of them get to thinking about it up there in their barracks. If they're going to be next, they want to die honorable; so they'd stick their gun barrel in their mouth and trip the trigger with their toe. So sometimes if you'd get one, you'd get

three or four.

Marcello: Did you actually participate in any of this yourself?

Burge: Well, I'll say no.

Marcello: Okay.

Burge: It preys on your conscience enough without having it written, but let's just say that anybody that got the opportunity or could make an opportunity to do this, it was kind of a sport.

Marcello: How much contact do you have with local native traders at these camps that are progressing through the jungle?

Burge: They're practically nil. This one old boy stopped in there; he was going the opposite way down this jungle road, you'd call it--it was just a trail--with his ox cart. So he asked the Japs if he could stay there overnight by their fire and so on so him and his animal would be safe. They said, "Yes."

Well, the next morning, he didn't have no oxen. Don't ever eat unborn calf (chuckle) . . . because it was about ready to have a calf. It was meat. About two bites of it and you could eat those chocolate-flavored Ex-Lax for a week, and you won't get the (chuckle) same results you get out of just a little bit of that unborn calf. Of course, I tried it, and it wasn't bad.

But anytime you'd rustle a cow or their oxen, the only

way you could kill them was cut their throat. Them Dutchmen was all there with their cups catching this warm blood. There wasn't any blood hit the ground, you know, unless they spilled it accidentally. They'd get that and drink it . . . just drink it hot. It's a one-time thing unless you're starving to death (chuckle).

Marcello: What other ways did you have to supplement your diet while you were back in the jungle?

Burge: Whatever fruit we could find and . . . well, anything that a bird or a monkey would eat, it was safe for human consumption.

Awhile ago you was talking about that dysentery. One morning I got up, and my stool indicated dysentery--that's blood and mucus. I thought, "Oh, boy, I've got it." Well, I didn't go anymore. Then that evening coming home, we found this tree of fruit. It was . . . oh, a cross between a . . . what do they call these fruits that we have here that's crossed? They've got a smooth peach skin on them. I know the name of them; I can't think of them, but they were a lot like this. They were nice and large, and that tree was loaded. The birds had been picking them, and you could see where the wild hogs and stuff had been eating them on the ground. I ate about ten of them, and we carried all we could in camp to give them to the sick guys. You

know that I never had another dysentery bowel movement, and a lot of them that was laying there dying that ate that fruit got well. That was the only tree we ever found.

Marcello: Did you ever run across very many snakes out in the jungle?

Burge: Yes. It's funny but I don't know of anybody that got snakebit all the time we was there. I woke up one night and felt something on me, I reached up there, and I got hold of a big old snake. I just give it a sling; I was trying to throw it out through that opening on the second row of bunks up above, and I didn't. It fell on them guys over there (chuckle), and there was a mad scramble. Of course, down here about fifty or seventy-five feet there's a fire going outside the hut, but that don't give you much illumination in there. I don't know what become of the snake, but nobody got bit that I know of.

One day I seen this real pretty snake. It was, oh, maybe eighteen inches or two feet and no bigger around than your little finger. It had all different bands of colors around it. I got a stick and I was rubbing them back and forth, and it'd change colors. The opposite sides of the scales had a different color on it. Some native seen me, and he like to have had a fit! He jerked me away from there, and what it was was a coral snake. I didn't know a coral snake from beans, you know.

Then we was working out of 105 Kilo, I believe; we was cutting right-of-way out through there. This Dutchman told the Jap guard he had to go to the bathroom. Well, like I say, there's no place for us to go; he wasn't going to get far away. So he went over there, and he sat down there by this log to do his business. Pretty soon he jumped up and started running at that guard just screaming with his old G-string sticking straight out behind him and his wooden shoes flying, and he's hot-footing it down through there. The guard cocked his rifle; he thought he'd went crazy; he was going to shoot him. The Dutchman realized this and quit running at him, but he kept pointing back, pointing back, see (chuckle). The guard went over there finally; he understood there was something over there he wanted. There was a big old python; he'd sat down alongside (chuckle) that python, and when it started crawling, it scared him.

Well, the Jap shot it, and we dressed it out. It had about a thirty-five-pound wild hog in it; it'd been laying there digesting it, see. Of course, they don't have fangs; they don't bite anyway; they strangle. But that Dutchman, I'll never forget him coming out of there screaming and running at that guard with that G-string sticking straight out behind him (chuckle).

Marcello: You have eaten snake meat, then.

Burge: Oh, yes, we ate that in Java when we first got there.
But you won't eat a python.

Marcello: Why is that?

Burge: We cut steaks off of that. Boy! We was going to really eat, because it was, oh, I guess, fourteen or fifteen feet long and maybe ten inches through. Everybody was going to get them a steak off of there. We took it and we boiled it and we boiled and we boiled it and we boiled it. There's no meat on a python; it's all gristle. You can't get your teeth into it. There's no way . . . if you cut it in little bitsy pieces--which we didn't have knives to do--you'd have never chewed it. But the juice off from it was out of this world; it tasted like spring chicken broth. That's just what it tasted like, was broth.

Marcello: What do you do for toothpaste, toothbrushes, and things of that nature?

Burge: Without.

Marcello: Can you improvise in any way?

Burge: You can chew up a stick or something, and, if you can find salt, brush your teeth with salt or something like that. Most of the time we'd just use our finger to keep the scum off of them--what you could.

Marcello: What do you do about your clothing? Is there any way

you can replace any of your clothing or anything like that?

Burge: Most of our clothing was replaced by stealing bottoms off of mosquito nets. They had about a foot of cloth around the bottom of them. Anytime we could get behind the guard's back, why . . . we didn't take it off of our own if we could help it, but we'd rip it off of theirs and make more G-strings.

Marcello: Was theft quite prevalent in terms of stealing from the Japanese, of course?

Burge: Anything that you could get was yours. You talk about picking up anything that was usable. We had this one Marine we called "Pack Rat." You've probably heard somebody refer to him--"Pack Rat" McComb; he's from out in California. He'd have a tire around his neck that he'd found or a piece of a tire; he'd have a whole bunch of buckets. In case anybody lost theirs, why, he'd sell you a bucket and all this kind of stuff, you know.

This was when we got to Saigon. We was out working on a radio tower, building blast walls around it, and this Japanese guard that came in . . . he wasn't a guard; he was there to see over some of the work. We always had our Korean guards after we got up there. But he had a big roll of money, and he said he'd just come from Manila;

he was on the invasion of Manila, and he was telling us all about it. He showed us this money; well, he put it in his shirt pocket. After awhile he got hot, and he took his shirt off and hung it up. Well, that was the biggest mistake he could make. Because we got ready to go, and he put his shirt on, and his roll was gone. Well, they made us drop our G-strings, and they looked up our butts, and they looked in our mouth, and they did everything--a perfect search--and he didn't find his money. All the time "Pack Rat" was opening his jaws and spreading his cheeks, he had that roll of money in his fist. Now that was the kind (chuckle) of a "dude" he was.

Marcello: What sort of punishment could you expect if you were caught stealing?

Burge: Oh, they'd beat you from now on and pass the word to keep an eye on you. If anytime they couldn't find somebody when they knew something had been stolen, why, you was up for grabs again until they caught somebody else, you know.

Marcello: What do you do in terms of shaving and haircuts and things of that nature?

Burge: We didn't have a shave or a haircut . . . weren't allowed anything like that until we got to Saigon. I had a beard

down about halfway to my belly button, and my hair was down over my shoulders like . . . we was the first hippies, I guess (chuckle), that the Americans had. There was nothing we could do about it. You'd just chew your mustache off with your teeth if you had any and keep it trimmed, you know, so you could get food in your mouth.

Marcello: Awhile ago you mentioned the fact that you were barefooted and had been barefooted so long that you got calluses on your feet.

Burge: Oh, yes.

Marcello: Now did I hear you say that the rats would chew on these calluses at night while you were sleeping?

Burge: Yes, they sure would. There'd be teeth marks all around; it'd be rough. They'd just go down sometimes until it showed pink, but I never knew them to bring blood on anybody. They'd just eat all that callus off around your feet. You'd never feel them or anything. Of course, you was tired enough that you didn't stay awake to see what was going on, you know. But they would; they'd eat that callus off, and you'd see little old teeth marks on there.

There was one Australian that got bit by a rat all the time we was up there, as far as I know. It was running across his face, and he grabbed it. It caught him in the

nose, and he went ahead and threw it and it tore the meat loose where it had bit into his nose. But he lived; I mean, he didn't have any ill effects from it. Of course, they gave us bubonic plague shots two or three times.

Marcello: The Japanese did this?

Burge: Yes.

Marcello: I'm sure it was as much for their own protection as it was for your protection.

Burge: Well, certainly. I mean, they had their ax to grind when they gave them to us. But I tell you what, they'd come out there on a working party when you'd come through after your rice. That's when they hit you with that needle. After those years in the sun . . . I looked at that guy and I wondered how come he wasn't giving it, and that old needle was just bending; it was just about to break, because it was derved dull and your skin was so tough. Finally, he got it through there, and it felt like a hickory nut under the skin. It was about two months; I could take that thing and just roll over my shoulder before it ever dissolved in there. When they could get something, they'd give it to you; like you say, it was as much for their protection as it was for yours.

Marcello: Did you have quinine and things of that nature for the malaria?

Burge: I don't think that up in the jungle, so far as I know, they didn't have it. Now like I say, I never went down there asking for any, but I'm sure if they had've, they'd have dispensed them, you know. They may have had a little bit for the very sickest or something like that; just dire cases got any medical supplies that they did have.

Marcello: Now you mentioned that after the 100 and 105 Kilo Camps, you were sent back down the railroad, so to speak.

Burge: Well, when we were at . . . I believe we'd went to 100 Kilo. They took part of us and sent us down to . . . that was the end of the railroad so far as the rails and train track had went. Then everything was pack-muled or hauled by truck or coolies or us coolies or whatever through there to supply. As they'd build the railroad out, we'd load the rails and the ties and supplies on, and they'd keep taking them to the end of the track--they called it--you know. Then they got it to 100 Kilo, and they moved us on up there again. The next group behind us moved up then to take it.

Marcello: Okay, so in other words, you were up at the 100 Kilo Camp, and then they sent you back to the 70 Kilo Camp. It was down here that you were loading supplies and so on and so forth.

Burge: Railroad supplies to go out to the end of the track. Then

they'd take the rails off and lay the ties and take the rails off and then come back after more.

Marcello: Now where were you taking these tracks and ties?

Burge: They'd bring them in on the train there and unload them.

Marcello: At 70 Kilo Camp.

Burge: At 70 Kilo Camp. Then we'd load them on the little flatcars that you pushed--maybe a dozen rails at a time--and run them on up the track and unload them up there, you know, as they laid the rails. Then you'd come back and get another load.

Marcello: About how long were you doing this?

Burge: Well, maybe a couple of months.

Marcello: Was this an easier job than making the cuts and fills and pile-driving?

Burge: Well, it was different, but the bugs was so thick that you had to . . . sometimes you'd take your G-string off and wrap it around your head to keep the bugs out of your ears and out of your nose and stuff like that, you know.

We did get a load of sweet potatoes there one time, though. They haven't ever figured what happened to them. They put them in there on the sidetrack--it was a wooden boxcar . All it took was one board out of the bottom of that thing. When they broke the seal on it the next day, there wasn't a sweet potato in there. They really turned

that camp upside down, and they never found a sweet potato nor peeling or anything.

They come through searching, and everybody'd have a fire going here and there, you know. Well, here'd be two or three handful of sweet potatoes down under them coals, and you'd have a bucket up here (gesture) with water boiling in it and some grass and leaves. They'd want to know about sweet potatoes. "Hell, I wouldn't be eating leaves and grass! I wouldn't be making that kind of stew if I had sweet potatoes!" So all down under this is sweet potatoes boiling, and down under the fire is sweet potatoes baking, see (chuckle).

Marcello: Now in our conversation off the tape, you were mentioning that from time to time the officers would hold these indoctrination sessions for the Japanese and Korean enlisted personnel.

Burge: Well, that was about an everyday occurrence. They'd have quarters like we did in the service, you know, and give them the plan of the day, what each one's detail was. Like, the "Speedo" campaign came from these morning meetings and stuff like that.

But they was always giving them propaganda, you know, giving them the latest news every morning. Of

course, they wanted to keep their morale up, so they'd tell them how they'd been bombing the United States and all this stuff.

As soon as you'd get out on a detail, that old Jap would hand you a bamboo stick or something and want you to draw a picture of the United States. So you'd draw a box out here, and he'd say, "Where's New York?" Well, you'd make an "X" over here on the east side of it. "Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!" "San Francisco?" You'd put an "X" on it. "Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!" Then they'd say, "Where's your home?" We'd put it over here. "Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!" It didn't matter where it was; it got bombed.

They'd get to telling you how bad they bombed your hometown, and you'd say, "Aw, bullshit!" "Bullshit? Where's that?" That's what he was saying, you know. You'd make another "X"; they'd just absolutely wiped it out! Boy, he thought that was the favorite place of everybody, see. They'd just say, "Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Just plenty, plenty bombing! Gone! Gone! Finished!"

Marcello: Under these circumstances, do you ever see men get more religious? Does religion play a part in a situation such as this?

Burge: I guess that's where I learned to pray. I was raised a Christian and went to Sunday School, and I got a Bible for attendance over so many years for perfect attendance and stuff; but it just don't seem to rub off on you as much when you're a kid as it does when the air gets short, you know. Everybody's got to have something, and that's about all you had. Yes, I think just about everybody has led a lot more Christian life since then.

Marcello: Also, in those circumstances I'm sure you see the very best and the very worst coming out in human beings.

Burge: Yes, but just speaking for the Americans, I don't know . . . well, I'll speak for the Aussies, too . . . I don't think that there was ever a soul that I know of that really what you'd call "curried favor" to get out of anything. I don't think there was ever a turncoat in the bunch. I'm proud of every one of them in that respect. Man, for the conditions and the sickness and all that, I don't know of any stealing that went on amongst us. There were very, very few fist fights; of course, you didn't feel like fighting. I don't think you could put another group of men together for that long under those conditions and have less friction of any kind or thievery or a bad side. It wasn't just survival of the fittest; you carried your

buddy along with you, you know.

Marcello: Do you form little cliques, so to speak, that is, two or three individuals who band together and look out for one another?

Burge: Yes, you'd have to do that. You've always . . . maybe you don't choose your bunkmate, but you get used to them--men on each side of you and seeing them every day and every night. Ninety-nine per cent of the time, if you slept next to each other, you worked next to each other, you know. So, yes, you'd call it a clique. It wasn't a clique . . .

Marcello: Not a clique in a malicious sense.

Burge: No. Yes, you get close to some people than you do to others, because you're in contact with them more. If you and I rode back and forth to work every day with each other and talked and visited, naturally we'd be closer than if we met once a month or once a year or something like that, you know.

I don't know of a one of them that I couldn't call right now and ask for anything, and if they had it, they would give it to me. I'm the same way. If they fly in from California at the airport over here . . . if they give anybody a call, you drop whatever you're doing and you go get them, bring them home, feed them,

put them up, take them on their journey wherever they're going to go. Each one of them can be counted on.

Marcello: How long is the war going to last now?

Burge: We can't figure why it's not already over. That six months has been gone for a year-and-a-half (chuckle), so it's tomorrow. Tomorrow's the big day. Everyday it's tomorrow.

Marcello: By this time, you are living from day-to-day.

Burge: Day-to-day.

Marcello: And in a sense, you thank God that you've made it through another day or that you'd lived to see another day.

Burge: Right. You thank Him for that next sunrise even if it's raining. You bet. He sure did a lot for . . . well, you take that many people, they might have died just from normal life here in the States over that long a time . . . probably not on account of the nature of the deaths and so on. But who knows? All you can do is pray for the ones that's gone and thank Him for you still being there.

Marcello: Do you think very much of home under those circumstances?

Burge: Oh, sure, you think of it . . . well, I worried about my folks. My mother is a worrier; if she doesn't have anything to worry about, she'll listen to the news on the radio and read the newspaper until she finds some

earth-shaking thing and then, "Oh! Isn't that terrible! Isn't that terrible!" Somebody calls on the phone, "Did you hear about Timbuktu? They shot one of their leaders over there!" "Isn't that awful?" My mother's a perpetual worrier, but she's got this thing, like I said, that she knew when I went from country to country, and they held services for me and had a funeral, you know, or whatever you call it. Her and an old Spanish-American War veteran was the only two in the country that didn't go to it. She says I was still alive and she knew it, and he said I was too mean to die (chuckle), because me and him used to run around together a lot. He was an old character. I don't know, I kind of catered to older people that's got a lot of past experience. I love to listen to them and talk to them, you know. You find so much that you don't find written down or come in contact with every day.

Like this old gentleman over here, this rancher. I'd go talk to him and sit out there--he's got stock tanks--and fish, and old George would smoke that pipe. Well, like, one day he said, "You know, back during the Depression, I was stuck out here with 800 acres and debts and four guys working for me for a dollar a month and room and board." He said, "We got so poor during the

Depression, I didn't have anything for them to do, and they didn't have anyplace to go." So he said, "I fed them after a fashion," and he said, "You notice how smooth the bricks are--the stones--on this house?" I said, "Yes, it's a real nice stone house." He said, "Those are all hand-smoothed. I had them go out here in the field and get these field stones and sit and rub them like for window sills and doorways and so on." He said, "Those are all hand-rubbed." Well, it's just things that you find out by talking to the oldtimers, you know.

Marcello: When did you finally get out of the jungle?

Burge: My! I think we was in there fourteen or fifteen months.

Marcello: Was it about October of 1943? Does that sound like a pretty good date?

Burge: Yes, I would imagine so.

Marcello: Where did you go when you got out of the jungle?

Burge: We went to Thailand . . . that place up there by . . .

Marcello: Kanchanaburi? Tamarkan?

Burge: Tamarkan. Up there by where the bridge over the River Kwae is? Yes.

Marcello: How did you get from the jungles to Tamarkan?

Burge: We walked part way, and they put us on a train and took us the rest of the way.

Marcello: Did you have any qualms about traveling on that railroad that you'd just built?

Burge: It wasn't the railroad we'd just built; it was a railroad on past there that the English had just built. There's Three Pagodas Pass, and it's just a high cliff. Lord only knows, it'd take you half a day to fall to the bottom of them gorges they got up there. They built a railroad right out beside this cliff. Knowing some of the work we did (chuckle), you get kind of leery about riding around there on a train, but I don't know of any of them that ever fell off.

Marcello: Are you implying that there was a great deal of sabotage done at the American end of that railroad?

Burge: Anything that you could do that would be undetected until you got out of there was done.

Marcello: What were some of the things that you would do?

Burge: Oh, like, with any material, you'd get defective parts. Like, a half-spike or something like that; well, it covers the hole. Well, you'd put that in a coupling, and you'd leave bolts loose to couplings or anything you can. Anytime that you can knock a wedge out from under a bridge without getting caught, you know, or something like that. When it was leveled up, it started to sway a little bit. You never knew what you're going to run into. I didn't enjoy

the ride.

Marcello: What did you do when you got to Tamarkan?

Burge: We weren't there too long; the bunch I was with weren't. They kept us moving pretty good. About the only thing I remember at Tamarkan . . . this old boy found some copper tubing, and he was making gold rings and selling them to the natives. He'd shine them up with ashes out of fire; boy, it looked just like gold. Them natives was just buying them as fast as they could get hold of them, as fast as he could saw them off and smooth them down, you know. And bananas. Boy, they was the best bananas you ever ate in your life!

Marcello: Was Tamarkan kind of a rest camp in a sense?

Burge: It was a rest camp, but it was an old camp.

Marcello: In other words, the Japanese had gotten just about all of the labor they could get out of the prisoners at that stage. They had to back off for a little while at least.

Burge: Well, we had the railroad built and trains running over it, and we had it ballasted and all that stuff. I don't know . . . I think we was bombed about once or twice there. We must not have been there over a couple of weeks.

Marcello: Do you remember any of the bombing that took place there at Tamarkan?

Burge: Well, they were after the bridge more than anything else.

They didn't hit the camp much, as I recall. They didn't come close to me.

Marcello: Did this bombing have any effect on the Japanese in terms of their attitude toward the prisoners?

Burge: Anytime they were bombed, they took it out on you, yes. They let you know that they didn't like you.

Marcello: What did this bombing do for your morale?

Burge: Man, every bomb made you feel better. The Allies were that much closer. The more frequent they were meant they were that much closer. "They still care! Boy, tomorrow's the day!"

Marcello: Now you mentioned that you were not at Tamarkan too long. Where did you go from Tamarkan?

Burge: We went to Saigon.

Marcello: And I assume that this is where you then spent almost the bulk of the rest of your time.

Burge: Yes, we spent the rest . . . I guess, a year-and-a-half was about what it was rounded out to.

Marcello: Okay, how did you get from Tamarkan to Saigon?

Burge: As I recall, we went by train again. We always wound up marching some, but wherever they could, they had trains.

Marcello: Where were you quartered when you got to Saigon?

Burge: Across the road from the docks.

Marcello: Were you working mostly on the docks here at Saigon?

Burge: No, that was a sideline. We had to build blast walls and machine gun emplacements and all kinds of things. I worked most of the time at the airdrome.

Marcello: What were you doing out there at the airdrome?

Burge: Me and a Mexican from down at San Antonio drove steam rollers. We about worked our way out of a job. We started out on a steamroller, and we had . . . the Korean guards would take us out there, and the Japs didn't want them around where you was working. "You just stand back and watch that they don't escape, and we'll work them; you're always messing with them and standing them up there at attention and slapping them around and stuff." They didn't have time for all this, the Japs didn't. So we had one old sergeant that would go with me and "San Antone," as I always called him, and we'd take turns working this steamroller.

Well, this honcho beat him up one night, because we weren't getting that fire going early enough in the morning. Of course, we shoved as little fuel in it as we could at a time. But he come out there the next day, and he said, "Now you've got one hour to get up steam and get this thing going." Well, we've been taking two or three, you know, anything to slow down the movement. We said, "Well, now it's very simple. All you've got to do at night is fill

that fire box full of fire, and the next morning, boy, it'll all be hot," you know. "Okay." He thought it over awhile, and he went and reported to his officer that we were going to build a big fire at night.

So we built a big fire. We was using rubber wood--they was cutting all the rubber trees down out there--and it's hot-burning stuff. Well, we got the water just about out of sight in the bottom of the boiler, and we filled it up with (chuckle) that rubber firewood and we went back to the barracks. We come back the next morning, and that thing had done melted through (chuckle). So they took us up around Hanoi someplace.

Marcello: How long were you at Saigon altogether then?

Burge: Oh, we was there about a year-and-a-half. But after we had burnt this steamroller up, they took me and "San Antone" up toward Hanoi and picked up an old Blackstone oil engine roller. It was about a ten-ton job, and it had a hot plug in it where you had to heat it. Then you flung a fly-wheel to get it started.

Well, we went up there, and it took about four or five days to chug back on that old thing. We got it down there, and we used it for a little while. We got to thinking, "How in the world are you going to wreck something like this?", you know. So we got to hammering

around one day when that old Jap had went over there to the native huts to get him something to eat. We got to hammering around on it and broke this rocker arm, this centric. Well, as far as I know, they was still braising on that when the war was over. Because everytime they'd braise it--they weren't good at it--and everytime they'd braise it, they'd have it a little off-center. As soon as you'd get it going good, it'd snap, see. We didn't have to sabotage it anymore.

So then they got us some gasoline rollers. They got two of them; one of them wouldn't hardly run, and the other one was in pretty good shape when we got it. But we'd urinate in the gas tank when he wasn't looking or something like that, you know, and tell him it was missing, and we'd be cleaning the plugs and spitting down on top of the pistons or take a leak if we had time, you know, and stuff like that. We got it pretty well-ruined.

The natives started stealing the battery out of them, so at night, he'd say, "You have to take the battery in." So we'd get a rotten rope and make us a "yo-yo pole," you know, and carry the battery between us. We'd get to bouncing it on our shoulder when he wasn't looking, and the rope would break and drop the battery and bust it.

So the next night, boy, he'd get us good rope, and

we'd get a rotten pole or something, see (chuckle). They'd beat the heck out of that old "dude"; man, he just got a beating every night we'd walk in there for something or other.

But we managed to make the war on that old . . . we just kept it running enough to have a job.

Marcello: So you were working out there at the airfield most of the time that you were at Saigon.

Burge: Most of the time, yes.

Marcello: Did you get a chance to work in any of the warehouses along the docks?

Burge: Well, we got a big chance. When you come in from your regular work party and get your rice, then pretty near all hands had to go over there and work three or four hours unloading the sampans, taking that rice in stores and putting it in the go-downs over there, you know.

Marcello: I'm sure that this presented all sorts of opportunities for stealing.

Burge: It paid for itself.

Marcello: You want to elaborate on that statement?

Burge: Well, sometimes there'd be sugar, and sometimes there'd be this, and sometimes there'd be that. I had acquired an Australian water bottle and made something like a flask, kind of semi-round, to fit your hip, and I carried it in

a canvas pouch. Well, you cut the bottom out of it and get it pretty well up to the top and then seal it up in there with resin or whatever you can get so it would kind of hold water. Well, you could take that thermos out real quick or that drinking cup and canteen and fill it up with whatever you could get, see. Then you'd have water on top, because they'd look in them bottles; they weren't quite that dumb.

But one day they looked in one, and it was full of American cigarettes in the packages yet. That like to have drove them up a wall--how in the world, in a three-quarter-inch hole, they got whole packs of American cigarettes in there. Man, I said they weren't dumb because they'd look in it. But it took officer after officer and conferences and everything else before they got sense enough to pull it out that canvas bag and look at the bottom of it. This old boy hadn't ever got the top . . . I figure he got greedy, you know, and he didn't have the top in there. But we got salt and sugar and cigarettes and anything like that.

Marcello: I understand this is where a lot of the prisoners were able to steal cloth, too, for trading to the natives.

Burge: Yes, yes, we'd get cloth and wrap it around you. They all wore belly bands, so they didn't think anything about

it if you had something wrapped around you; you could carry it right out in the open as long as it wasn't too much of it, you know. And the bottoms off of every mosquito net when you'd be out on work details and so on, you know . . . one of you'd get to drawing maps of the United States and asking all these questions, and somebody else would be over there getting all that cloth off the bottom of their mosquito nets, you know.

Marcello: I guess life wasn't too bad here in Saigon in being a prisoner.

Burge: It picked up real good in Saigon. I got back up to about 140 pounds there. The food was better, and I wasn't working so hard, and we had pretty good quarters.

Marcello: Where were you staying?

Burge: Well, it was these barracks along . . . I think that they had been native barracks.

Marcello: Were they fairly habitable?

Burge: Well, yes. They were by far the best we'd had since we left Bicycle Camp, if not better. There the facilities were good. You had a big . . . what we'd call a horse trough, made out of concrete, with running water in it all the time and concrete around it so you wasn't standing in the mud washing your feet. They had pretty good restrooms. Of course, they were the native restrooms again where you'd

squat. But all in all, it was 100 per cent better than anything we'd had.

Marcello: Did you still have your beard and long hair?

Burge: They let us shave them off after we got there. They gave us shears and clippers one day. You'd never believe they were your very best buddies that you have been together day and night for a year-and-a-half. You take their beard off and their hair off, and you can recognize them only by their voice. Now you might think that's funny, but that makes so much difference. I suppose I looked as funny to them as they looked to me, but you might walk right by somebody that you know, and neither one of you would speak to the other one because (chuckle) he don't look the same; you're perfect strangers.

Marcello: All this time, had you ever received any Red Cross parcels?

Burge: We got one in Saigon, as far as I remember. What was supposed to be for one person--the Japanese took so many of them or somebody did--that one parcel was split up amongst about eight people, I believe.

Marcello: How important were those parcels to you?

Burge: Well, you didn't get enough of it for it to mean too much. It let you taste Eagle Brand cream and maybe a Lucky Strike cigarette. You just didn't get much when eight or ten people divided one of those little packages.

Marcello: Now while you were at Saigon, were you ever subjected to any bombing?

Burge: Oh, yes. Yes, we had some pretty good air raids there. The best one was right along toward the last. They pulled a raid, I guess, from Singapore to Hong Kong. It was a big, long one; it was all up and down the coast. It was all simultaneous.

In Saigon, the water level is so high--it's maybe a foot under the ground--that you can't dig a trench. You had to build a blast wall out of the mud up high, see. Well, we had them out behind our camp. Of course, at the airport there was plenty of places to get in, because, there again, is where we'd take out the dirt in meters. So you had a good deep place to get in, you know.

But we was standing at quarters one morning, and somebody said, "My God! Where did them Japs get all those planes?" It was kind of level--there was some big trees--but you could see the airspace over the airport about ten or twelve miles away. And it was just a beehive of fighter planes.

About that time, one of them come down out of the top, and you'd see this Zero just get up above the treetops. Then you'd see his parachute bloom out. This other old boy pulled up, and he said, "Hell, them's American planes!"

It was the Marines from the Navy, you know. Boy, they bombed and they bombed and they bombed.

We had been assigned billets on ships to go to Japan, and they'd been bringing the ships in. I guess we was only a couple of days from going aboard them to go to Japan. So then they come over to bomb the docks after . . . they got 104 airplanes on the airfield that day. So then they come over and they bombed the docks.

Well, we're out in these shelters by then. There was gun emplacements out around us and gun emplacements across the channel from the docks. Well, they'd fly right over us strafing; they'd strafe the emplacements over there, and then they'd dip down and drop their bombs and then peel out, you know. They all worked real good together; they'd been there before . . . not maybe in Saigon. They dropped a few out in them rice paddies, and being built up instead of having a hole in the ground, them things was just like being on a ship; they'd just rock and roll, you know.

We didn't have any real anxious moments, but this one pilot . . . and I think it was this Reese that I met the other day that had talked to a pilot that was in that raid that day. He got a 500-pounder hung in the rack--a belly-bomb. He come right over our heads flipping

that thing, just barrel-rolling it--trying to flip that thing out. He got on past us; he went in the channel over there.

But they got eighty-four ships in the harbor; they got 104 planes on the ground at the airport; they got all the oil tanks and, as far as I know, all the ammo dumps. They quit at 11:30, they came in at eight o'clock, and they worked until 11:30.

Between 11:30 and one o'clock, they got us all together and took us out to the airport trying to repair it, you know. At one o'clock them "dudes" come back, and they worked until dark, and they did one beautiful job. Them boys'd come down, and if they'd put their wheels down, they'd have been landed.

By that time, we know that they know we're there, see, so we're sitting up on top of the trenches out there. We'd point this way and that way: "You missed one!" They'd go back up a little bit and look around and come back down through; they'd just fly right over us.

Marcello: What were the Japanese doing all this time?

Burge: Going crazy (chuckle). Their guns were firing at them and so on. Then that evening . . . like I say, they stayed there until pretty near dark; they must have all had to make after-dark carrier landings. Some more squadrons

that they'd bombed out someplace else came in. There must have been sixteen or eighteen more fighters come in that night and piled up out there on the runway. It was a pretty good day's tally just in that one place.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were destined to be sent back to Japan. What did you think about the idea of going to Japan?

Burge: Well, that was something you tried not to think of, because if you went to Japan, then they was going to have to land up there to get you out of there. None of us were in favor of taking a trip at that time, especially after these planes had been coming in bombing and all that stuff, you know.

We was bombed at other times. There was an old boy . . . he's from up around Decatur or Jacksboro, up in there someplace, because I seen him not too long ago; I guess it was in Lubbock at our last meeting. Me and him was standing out there one night . . . these horse troughs I was telling you about were called "tongs." We was standing there, and they got this big high bamboo fence around this side of the camp. Well, these B-24's would fly up over the river, up the channel--it was really a river--and they'd stay right on top of the water where the Japs couldn't depress their guns, down on account of their blast

walls, to shoot at them. Well, they'd be up there in town before you ever knew it, see. And they'd go "woosh" across that dock strafing and bombing, and then they'd come right out over camp, the way they'd take this circle.

Well, me and old "Fat Boy" were out there watching and talking . . . and they had this big pit dug there to put sour rice and any kind of garbage or refuse in. Like I say, it was only a foot down to water, so naturally it was wet and muddy in there. That bamboo started flying off the fence over our head, and old "Fat Boy" went "chunk," right into that thing, see. I dropped down behind the concrete "tong" there. Old "Fat Boy" come up, and he's got this slop all over him, and he said, "It would take a dumb 'so-and-so' to do that, wouldn't it?"

Well, we forgot about the tailgunner in the god-darned thing, see. He opened up and "Fat Boy" went back in there again (chuckle).

Marcello: Let's talk about the period leading up to your liberation. Describe how the liberation came about. How you found out the war was over, things of that nature.

Burge: Well, they had moved us from the docks into some French barracks uptown. As things got worse, the working parties kind of slowed down. We woke up one morning, and everybody

said, "There ain't no guards on the gate!" So we didn't know anything about the bombs and stuff, you know, at Hiroshima and all that stuff. "Ain't no guards on the gate."

Marcello: Now were these still the same guards that you had had on the railroad, or had they changed by this time?

Burge: A few of them were, but you just put them all together; anytime you can get one, you get him, you know. With the Kangaroo Court afterwards, I don't think that there was one Korean left in Saigon. We didn't mess with the Japs, because the Japs hadn't been that . . . although they'd allowed it to happen, they hadn't been that mean personally to most of us.

If you were a pilot or something, then you came under Japanese Kempei discipline and prison. I don't think I ever seen but one pilot, and I don't know what became of him. Most of them they interrogated to death up there.

Well, the officers said, "Well, hang around here until we see what's going on." Later on, I guess, about ten or eleven o'clock, they came over and dropped pamphlets that said, "Stay where you are. The Air Force will be in to get you out," you know.

Marcello: But the Japanese never gave you any word at all as to what

was taking place.

Burge: No. If they did, they just gave it to the officers, and the officers kept it quiet to keep discipline. I wouldn't say that nobody knew, but us old coolies didn't know anything about it.

Marcello: What was your reaction when you read these pamphlets and learned that the war was over and that you would very shortly be liberated?

Burge: Well, you just give a big old sigh and say, "I told you yesterday it'd be today," you know (chuckle). That was what we'd been living on.

Marcello: Was there any sort of a celebration?

Burge: No. No big celebration. We just . . . well, I guess the same afternoon, some of us wandered out in town looking for a beer or something, you know.

Marcello: Now was this against all of the orders that you'd received and so on? In other words, were you supposed to stay in the camp?

Burge: Well, we didn't have any strict orders to stay in there that I know of, because nobody said anything about us going. They told us to stick around until we found out what was going to happen, and when we got the pamphlets, why, we found out what was happening.

Shoot, me and old "Fat Boy," again, we like to get

killed the next day. We got along all right the first evening, and the next day we went out. Well, I guess there'd been some Air Force planes that came in, but we didn't know it yet.

We were walking up the street, and a Frenchman asked us to come have dinner with them. So we said, "Fine." He apologized; he said, "We have very poor food, but we have plenty of it." Well, they had rice and boiled cabbage and lots of wine. There was plenty of it, and we appreciated it, you know. His wife and children couldn't speak any English, but he could speak pretty good broken English. So we was sitting there having wine after dinner. They didn't pour your wine; they just set a bottle in front of each plate, and you'd drink out of it, see.

The street had been filling up the day before. These natives were sitting around, and they'd dug up their old weapons and stuff, and they was scraping the rust off of knives and guns and sharpening their knives on the curb and sharpening up green bamboo poles and all this stuff.

So we'd just finished eating dinner, and we heard a couple of shots, which I found out later was the first two shots fired in the Vietnamese War. A priest . . . somebody was trying to break into his church, some of these Communists, and he'd shot them or shot at them. I don't

know if he killed them. But those were the two shots we heard.

That's all it took. Boy, I'm telling you, they come up across from that house we was in with machine guns and just blew the front windows all out of it and the plaster on the inside, you know. You could hear shots all up and down the street, and, of course, we hit the floor. "What the heck's going to happen now?" Well, we looked out there real carefully, and there's some POW's walking up and down the street out there in their G-string, and nobody's saying a word.

Marcello: Now were you still in your G-string?

Burge: I was at the time. We hadn't been issued any clothes yet to amount to anything. So we said, "Well, they're not bothering them." Of course, for a year-and-a-half we've been stealing from the Japs and selling to them and vice versa, you know; we've been kind of scratching each other's back.

But they were all red-eyed. Boy, they was worked up into a rage, see. They started to shoot all the French . . . well, anybody that was French. So me and old "Fat Boy" walked out on the porch, and they didn't pay any attention to us.

About that time, some Frenchman come breaking in the

backdoor and hollering. It was a friend of this fellow we had lunch with, and he said . . . he was the one that told us that they was shooting all the French, and he had to get down to this hospital. He was a big surgeon, I guess, in Saint Joseph's; it's a beautiful big hospital in Saigon, which we didn't happen to be too far from.

So this guy said, "Well, now look, they're not bothering you guys. Would you try and escort this man up there to the hospital?" Well, we had another swig of that good old French wine. "Yeah, we'll take him." So he went in the backyard, and he got his bicycle, and he folded his coat over his arm--just as French as French can be, you know. Of course, I guess he was quite a dignified figure around there.

We go down this street we're on, and everything's fine. One of us is on each side of him, and they even step off the sidewalk to let us go through. Nobody's saying a word until we get out there and we turn up this big boulevard; it must have been eight or ten cars wide.

Just as we get started up it--you can see the hospital gate up on the left up there; man, I got a perfect picture of that--here come these natives or Communists or whatever you want. They just come down around there just like water flowing through a culvert. It's just from a fence over

here (gesture) to the walls over here--of humanity. Well, hell, we can't run; that'd be admitting guilt or you was up to something, you know. So we just kept walking, and we got twenty or thirty feet up into that mass.

Then all the sudden somebody said something, and somebody said something else, and they just put a ring of guns and knives and them green bamboo stobs around each one of us. They wanted to know just where we thought we was going and what we was up to. Well, we told them, and, man, we was speaking Japanese and Vietnamese and English and what-have-you (chuckle). Some guy there--one of the natives--could speak French pretty good, and this doctor is just talking up a storm himself, you know, because he's the one that's in hot water more than we are (chuckle). But, of course, we was aiding and abetting him. He showed them his card and so on, and so they "yakked" around there awhile, and they decided it would be all right. He promised them that any wounded would be allowed to come up and be laid on the inside of the gate, and his attendants would come out and take them in and give them the best of care. So they worked out a deal, and we took him on up to the gate and turned around and went back down with all these people. Everything is just fine. They didn't pay no attention to us.

I said, "Fat Boy, I've had enough liberty for today. I'm ready to go back to camp." (chuckle) So we started back down the street. We get down in kind of the industrial district there, and they're just shooting up and down that street like you wouldn't believe, so we stayed behind a building.

An old boy come running out of the doorway with his gun and wanting to know what we was doing there. "Well, we want to go back to camp, and we've gotta cross this street." "Okay!" Everything was fine. He got congenial, and he blew a whistle. They blow a whistle up the street, and they blow a whistle down the street; the shooting kind of slacks off; and he waved a white flag, and they waved white flags. He said, "Okay." We walk across the street and get behind the buildings on the other side; he blows his whistle again; they start shooting again (chuckle).

Marcello: How long was it before you were finally repatriated by the Americans?

Burge: Oh, five or six days; it wasn't very long. After our escapade up there that day, the Air Force commandeered the Continental Palace Hotel downtown and made it a refuge for all women and children that wanted to come in. Well, they came out to the camp, and they gave us some suntan khakis and a carton of cigarettes and asked for guards to

go down to this hotel. So on each landing and each balcony and the roof and so on, they stationed us, you know. I don't know . . . it was one day or two days from then that me and Elmo Kennedy was there. Of course, they gave us a bottle of rum apiece.

We'd stood our four hours of guard duty, so we put our G-strings back on, and we went down to look the town over. We found a pretty nice, friendly little bar down there and got pretty well "swacked" and come back around midnight.

This old pilot, he said . . . incidentally, this pilot was on an island in the Pacific that the Japs had one end of the runway and we had the other. Well, he was flying explosives in and out of that place; he flew the "Hump" all during the war up in China. He'd seen it all. We walked in, and he said, "How in the world do you guys get out there and back?" He said, "Everytime I stick my head out the door, they take a shot at me." Well, he had the American flag on his back and he had a big CBI patch--China-Burma-India patch--on his shoulder and his pilot's cap and all that.

We said, "Come on up; we'll fix you up." We took him up there to the room and got him in a G-string . . . made him strip down and put a G-string on him and said,

"Come on." Well, we went back down to this bar and woke old "mamasan" up, and she got the girls up and everything, and we proceeded to have a ball again.

Well, he was pretty well "swacked" when we come in about 4:30 or five o'clock, and they're knocking on the doors to take off and go out to the airport. Wouldn't you know we got out to the airport, and we caught that "dude" for a pilot (chuckle) and pretty near had to help him aboard.

Marcello: Where do they take you after you get aboard the plane?

Burge: We went to Bangkok and then to Karachi and then to Calcutta. We was in Calcutta about nineteen days.

Marcello: What happened when you got to Calcutta?

Burge: Oh, they put us in the hospital there in this 2nd General Hospital or something like that and fed us steaks and vitamin pills.

Marcello: Did you have any trouble readjusting to that type of food again?

Burge: Well, yes, you didn't eat much of it. It'd kind of tear your stomach up a little bit. Now me, I'd had rice pudding all my life for breakfast . . . cereal or something like that, you know. I liked rice. I was eating a lot of rice in the Philippines and Honolulu before we got in prison. I would rather have rice today that I would potatoes. But some of them didn't, and some of them fared pretty good, and

some of them didn't. Some people's stomachs were in worse shape than others. On the whole, it didn't take too long, you know. I know people that haven't had a grain of rice--and swear they never will--since then.

Marcello: I assume that they made no plans to prepare you in a psychological sense for the type of world that you were going to find when you came back.

Burge: No. These Japs, you know, they'd always be teasing about having women in the Army and stuff. "Aw, that's a bunch of baloney," you know. "Maybe nurses, but no soldiers and stuff."

So we got to Karachi, and we was out there in the desert in pup tents. Boy, it was hot; the wind was blowing all the time. So I asked some soldier there if there was anyplace to get a beer, and he said, "Down the road here about a mile." Well, I took off by myself.

Here comes this big old "six-by" roaring up alongside of me. "You want a ride, Mac?" I looked up and here's a big robust blonde driving that thing. I said, "Yeah, I'm going down here. They tell me there's a beer joint down here." "Yeah. Hop in." So I climbed in there, and I said, "What are you doing here?" Well, she said, "I'm a WAC," and I didn't even know what a WAC was. I found out from her in the next mile that there was women in the

Army and that they was called WAC's. That was the first surprise, you know.

Marcello: Did you have a very hard time adjusting to civilian life after you got out of the military?

Burge: Well, I didn't get out . . . you know, like I say, I stayed for twenty years. By that time, I didn't have any trouble adjusting, really.

Marcello: Let me put it to you this way. After you were liberated, how long was it before you re-enlisted again?

Burge: I never did get a discharge.

Marcello: I see. Why did you decide to stay in the service?

Burge: Well, I had seven years in. I had just a little while to go when the war started of being discharged on four years. I had seven years in, and they told us that we had two years shore duty . . . all POW's had two years shore duty coming. So I said, "Well, that gives me nine years, and I don't know anything outside." And I didn't like it outside then. I said, "That'll give me nine years; that's almost half a career in there, so I'll just stay." So when I got my nine years in . . . well, I shipped over when I came back.

Marcello: Why did you have two years of shore duty?

Burge: I guess to become Americanized again or something. I don't know why, but they said, "All POW's get two years of shore duty if they stay in the service."

Marcello: Oh, if they stay in the service.

Burge: Yes.

Marcello: I see. In other words, if you had decided to get out of the service, then you wouldn't have had to put in this two years.

Burge: No, no, no, no. It was just if you stayed in. You got two years of shore duty.

Marcello: You said awhile ago that you didn't like the world that you saw out here. Can you elaborate on that?

Burge: Well, I'll give you an example. When I got home . . . I was home five days out there on a farm with my mother and father, and I was climbing the walls. I love them very much, and they love me very much; they did everything they could to please me. But with that peace and quiet and serenity, after what you'd been in so long, you'd just about blow up.

I was home five days, and I left and come down here to Houston, and I was gone over a month just knocking around . . . of course, going on "benders" and stuff like that.

The Navy Department wrote and told us after we was home five days, "Your leave is cancelled. You report to San Jacinto Post Office in Houston to ride the new Houston up the channel. You'll be aboard for a week." That's how

I got down here in the first place for the second time. So I came down, and then it took me a month to get back home. By that time, I was getting climatized a little bit.

Marcello: As you look back over your experience as a prisoner-of-war, what do you see as being the key to your survival?

Burge: Oh, my upbringing. The Good Lord. Man, he got me through it all as far as that goes . . . ain't nobody else. An uncle, when I went in, said, "Well, if I figure anybody can make it in the military, you can." I thought a lot of that uncle. When the going would get pretty tough sometimes, I'd think, "Well, now if I don't hang in there, Uncle Harry's going to be disappointed," you know. That was kind of my staying power, and then the Lord kept hold of my shirt collar and kept me in the right place at the right time. I don't know . . . it was just my make-up, I guess. I said, "To hell with them! They ain't getting me down, and they're going to be here tomorrow, so I'd better stick around and wait for them."

Marcello: Well, Mr. Burge, I think that's probably a pretty good place to end this interview. I want to thank you very much for having taken time to talk with me. You've said a lot of very interesting and important things, and I'm sure that scholars are going to find your comments very

valuable.

Burge: Well, I hope I have. It's like I say. Some of us remember one thing . . . you've got to talk to a whole bunch of people that were right alongside of me, and you'll get a whole bunch of different stories. Because some of them will remember one thing, and you can let them read my book, and they'll say, "Yes, that's right. I remember that now"; but they won't remember it before. I never was one for keeping dates in mind like when we went from one camp and what was the camp. It was just an existence, because tomorrow we was going to be freed so what the heck made the difference, see. To some, they like to keep records; some are natural-born historians and fact-diggers and so on, and some of us are just plodders. And I happen to be a plodder (chuckle).

Marcello: Well, again, I want to thank you very much for your comments.

Burge: Well, Dr. Marcello, I've enjoyed it to no end. I hope I did you some good . . . I don't know. But I certainly have enjoyed it, and it was nice meeting you, and I want you to get back here sometime. When you're passing through, just stop and say hello and visit awhile. We won't have to sit in one place all the time (chuckle).